

"Going faster than speed"

Leigh Davis, 1983-1985

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with Leigh Davis's literary projects of the mid-1980s: *And* magazine and *Willy's Gazette*. These projects sought to effect a fundamental change in New Zealand's literary culture through the introduction of critical theory. This programme for literary reform coincided with the initiation of the monetarist reforms of New Zealand's economy. Davis had a professional involvement with these reforms, as he worked in Treasury between 1980 and 1985. This thesis proposes to investigate whether or not a connection can be demonstrated between poststructuralism and neoliberal theory, using Davis as a test case.

Chapter one situates this thesis in relation to the discourse about the political implications of poststructuralism, introducing the key critical figures to whom I appeal. This chapter goes on to address the historical situation of Davis's work, discussing the cultural and political environment in New Zealand during the early 1980s, and providing a detailed analysis of a Treasury briefing paper on which Davis worked. The chapter concludes by considering Davis's dual position in the political centre and on the aesthetic margins.

Chapter two addresses Davis's critical writing in *And*, considering the influence of manifestos of the modernist avant-garde on his work, and his positioning of his own project in relation to poets Allen Curnow and Ian Wedde. Moving on to Davis's enthusiastic review of the poetry of Roger Horrocks, this chapter also considers the influence of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E movement on Davis's poetics.

Closer examination of Davis's poetics is undertaken in chapter three, which considers the significance of speed and history in *Willy's Gazette*.

...the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional.

T.S. Eliot "Tradition and the Individual Talent"

SPEED IS ESSENTIAL. IT IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO GO TOO FAST.

Roger Douglas *Unfinished Business*

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this thesis is to explore the relationship between Leigh Davis's poetic and theoretical work during the 1980s and the political context in which he was writing. Such an exploration is provoked not only by the dramatic changes which occurred in both New Zealand's literary and political cultures during this period, but by Davis's involvement in both programmes of reform. After completing a Master's degree in English at the University of Auckland in 1979, Davis began working at Treasury in 1980, remaining there until 1985 (when he moved to the merchant-banking firm Fay Richwhite). During his time at Treasury, Davis maintained his involvement with the literary arts, publishing his first volume of poetry, *Willy's Gazette*, in 1983. In the same year he founded (with Alex Calder) *And* magazine, which appeared four times between October 1983 and October 1985. The *And* enterprise sought to renovate critical writing about the arts through the introduction of literary theory, in particular French poststructuralism.¹ As a practitioner of postmodern poetry and an editor of *And* magazine, Davis was a significant player in what can be seen retrospectively as the theoretical turn in New Zealand's literary discourse.

At the same time that Davis and his *And* collaborators were staging their ambush on the literary scene, Davis's employer, Treasury, was embarking on a different kind of ambush. The *And* intervention coincided with a wholesale revision of New Zealand's economic policy, and a shift away from the role of government as it had been conceived of in the post-Depression era. In the years preceding the election of the fourth Labour government in 1984, hostility towards the protectionist policies of Robert Muldoon was growing among Treasury officials, who were becoming increasingly influenced by monetarist

¹ The new perspectives *And* marketed came late to New Zealand, and had already found purchase in universities in Europe and North America during the late 1970s.

theory.² The structural adjustment programme designed by Treasury, and outlined in their 1984 briefing paper *Economic Management*, drew on the writings of economic theorists such as Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman. This represented a radical break with New Zealand's Keynesian tradition and, as the new theory was adopted by the Labour government, it resulted in a total reshaping of New Zealand's economy. This coincidence of economic and literary/critical restructuring provokes the question at the heart of this inquiry: what connection, if any, can be demonstrated between the changes that occurred in the cultural and political spheres.

Because of my particular interest in the political and cultural restructuring of the early and mid-1980s this thesis focuses on the projects Davis undertook during those years. His more recent work has not been attended to in this research, although aspects of his newer projects (particularly his application of digital technology to poetry) demonstrate interesting continuities with the work considered here. His Master's thesis on Allen Curnow also falls outside my narrow time-frame, however some consideration is given to it, due to the significance of his quarrel with the grand old man of New Zealand literature, and the persistence of this quarrel in Davis's later work.³ Attention is also given to the section of *Economic Management* that Davis was involved in composing. However, his contribution to the *And* project and the sonnet sequence *Willy's Gazette* are the texts with which this study is primarily concerned.

My project is informed in part by discourse regarding the politics of poststructuralism, which has emerged from the North American academy

² The economic orthodoxy on which the structural adjustment programme was based is variously identified by commentators as "monetarism," "neoliberalism," "more-market economics," "economic rationalism," the theory of the "free-market," and "New Right economic theory." I predominantly use the term neoliberalism in this thesis, but I also use these other terms interchangeably.

³ For example, Davis's essay in *And*/3, "Solo Curnow," draws heavily on his thesis.

during the last two decades. It should be noted that this debate, which is sketched out in the first section of chapter one, is a complicated and adversarial discourse, and thus any attempt to summarise it is bound to be inadequate. Nevertheless, in order to situate my argument it is appropriate to discuss the assertions of a number of critics regarding the political status of theory.

The critics to whom I appeal most frequently in relation to this issue, and whose comments are most fully explored, are Fredric Jameson, Edward Said and Andrew Ross. My selection of these three critics (among the many who have written on the question of poststructuralism's political implications) is not arbitrary. The essays by Jameson and Said which ground my discussion both appear in Hal Foster's 1983 collection of essays entitled *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, making them coeval with the inception of the *And* project and the publication of the *Gazette*. The comments from Andrew Ross are drawn from his introduction to *Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism*. While this volume is from a slightly later moment (it was published in 1989), it is invoked as a reflection on the politics of theory in the 1980s from a historically proximate position.

Jameson proposes that the complicity between "postmodernism" and "late or consumer capitalism" is an effect of our "loss of history." He suggests that as a result of our accelerated, media-saturated society, "reality" is transformed into "images," and time is "fragmented" into a series of "perpetual presents," and thus we lose our sense of historical continuity ("Postmodernism and Consumer Society" 124). Said and Ross both address the problem of poststructuralism's inaccessibility for those without what Said refers to as "professional literary accreditation" (139). Said suggests that contemporary theory often operates as a "discourse of occultation and legitimation" (156), reinforcing the authority of the academic centre while professing to deconstruct the notion of institutional

authority. Ross also argues that the democratising potential of poststructural discourse is limited by its complexity, which alienates those on the social and academic margins (ix-xi).

As will be discussed, both poststructuralism and neoliberalism have appeal for those close to their respective centres of power, but operate in ways which can reinforce the marginality of those less privileged. In relation to this it is interesting to consider Davis's own position during the transitions of the 1980s. Although Davis did not choose to pursue an academic career, his theoretically aware Master's thesis, and his engagement with poststructuralism evidenced in *And*, place him in a position of authority. Having what Said refers to as "professional literary accreditation" (139), Davis is able to exercise his power over texts, subjecting the work of writers who were authoritative under previous literary regimes to his new model of criticism. Davis was not only close to power in relation to poststructuralist theory during this period. His position in Treasury, the most powerful government department, locates him at the centre of political and economic authority.

The synchronicity of the *And* moment with the adoption of economic liberalism in New Zealand is intriguing, and could be read as suggestive (in a vague kind of way) of a sympathetic relation between late or consumer capitalism and postmodernism. Such a suggestion would, of course, be merely conjectural, as synchronicity and sympathy don't necessarily go hand-in-hand. However Davis's professional involvement in both movements, his institutionally sanctioned authority in matters literary and economic, enables one to employ him as a test case. As a point of intersection between the literary and economic worlds, Davis's oeuvre invites analysis in light of the putative link between

postmodern culture and the "logic of late capitalism."⁴

Writing about the culture of literary criticism during the 1980s (in a global context), Michael Bracewell makes a number of observations that happily set the scene for my investigation of Davis's work. Bracewell notes that by the latter half of the '80s

[t]erms such as 'accelerated', 'fragmented' and 'dystopic' were in currency, conveying the sense of a new, volatile, high-speed culture — the future was beginning with the ruination of history. (8)

The celebration of speed in Davis's work, and its relation to his understanding of history, are key threads in my examination of both his criticism and poetry. Davis's work demonstrates his fascination with the process by which cultural products (be they cars, planes or poets) become "historical." His "Note" to *Willy's Gazette* professes this interest, and the poems themselves gather together a dizzying array of historical signifiers. His critical writing about both Curnow and Ian Wedde is intended to historicise their work, locating them on a literary continuum which he sees himself as both part of (as the vanguard) and divorced from (as a point of rupture). His understanding of history is markedly different from that of Jameson however, and this issue is explored in my thesis. Davis does not view the acceleration of culture as "fragmenting" time into a series of "perpetual presents" as Jameson does ("Postmodernism" 124). Instead, he sees it as making cultural products "historical," converting them into artifacts, more rapidly. Whether or not this understanding of history constitutes the "ruination of history" announced by Bracewell is a central concern of this thesis.

⁴ This paraphrases the title of Jameson's essay "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146, 1984, 53-92; and also his 1991 book of the same name.

Bracewell also notes the "sheer fashionability, at that time, of critical theory" as embodied by the production style of the semiotext(e) publications — the "aesthetically exquisite handbooks of the avant-garde"— which had "sexed up the dusty world of critical theory" (8-9). Theory was constructed as fashionable through its adoption of an "avant-garde" stance, and the "handbooks" of this theoretical vanguard were "sexed up" through their startling titles and their handsome production. His comments are apposite in terms of Davis's position in the early '80s. The notion of critical theory as a site of avant-garde resistance underpins the steadfast oppositionality of Davis's stance, as he proposes a distinction between his project and the bourgeois aesthetics of his precursors. The refiguring of the "dusty world" of literary criticism as something shiny, cool and new, and the attention to making theory marketable through stylish production, are similarly features of this moment which one can identify in Davis's projects. Both *And* and the original edition of the *Gazette* appealed to a punk aesthetic, stylishly rejecting the staid and expensive production of established literary magazines and the publications of established poets. Davis certainly considered the literary scene in the early '80s as "dusty" and outmoded, and his own projects were designed to be both controversial and "funky" — he wanted to spice things up.⁵

The "fashionability" of critical theory, described by Bracewell, was not only manifest in the suave production of the texts of writers such as Baudrillard, Foucault and Virilio however. It also inhered in the language of this criticism, and contributed to a new (cool) pose for the critics themselves:

the language (jargon, jive talk, call it what you will) of this latest

⁵ Davis's desire for critical texts to be "funky" is evidenced in his review of Antony Easthope's *Poetry as Discourse*, which appeared in *And*/3. He considers it to be a "straightforward, well-judged" text, but he ultimately sees it as an "English textbook," which lacks "pizzazz," "glamour," and "resistance." "Group Show" 111-12.

criticism was very romantic, in a New Romantic sort of way, as it seemed to conflate the rhetoric of science with the imagery of dandyism, positing the critic as a kind of chic urban guerrilla über-technician, carrying out missions of anthropological field work. (9)

The "conflation of the rhetoric of science with the imagery of dandyism" is a crucial characteristic of Davis's work. His appropriation of economic terminology in his critical writing demonstrates his appeal to a "scientific" discourse,⁶ while his penchant for adopting outrageous poses (also an attribute of Willy, the eponymous central figure of the *Gazette*) is distinctly dandyish. His dandyism is one of the means by which Davis makes his theoretical projects "funky," as he casts himself as "chic" and fashion-conscious. It connects with the enthusiasm for speed in his work, as staying "fashionable" (the dandy's preoccupation) requires the ability to keep up with the ever-increasing pace of cultural change. This also relates to Davis's understanding of history, as this desire to keep up with the latest trends reflects an infatuation with the opposition between the new and the "historical."

It is useful to introduce Barthes's notion of the dandy here, as it informs my reading of dandyism in Davis's work:

Le Dandy ~ The Dandy

Lavish use of paradox risks implying (or quite simply: implies) an individualist position, and one may say: a kind of dandyism. However though solitary, the dandy is not alone . . . in

⁶ The delineation of economics as a science is problematic, as it suggests that it is a politically neutral discipline; however in this context, because of Davis's own use of market discourse, it is an example of such "conflation." For a discussion of the neoliberal insistence that economics is scientific see 43-44 below.

a given historical situation — of pessimism and rejection — it is the intellectual class as a whole which, if it does not become militant, is virtually a dandy. (A dandy has no philosophy other than a transitory one: a life interest: time is the time of my life.) (*Roland Barthes* 106)

I wish to point to a number of features of this description. Barthes's understanding of dandyism as inherently "individualist" makes clear the socio-political significance of such a pose. The dandy is disconnected from society inasmuch as he/she has only a "life interest"; a "transitory" philosophy which concerns only his/her own existence. The dandy's understanding of time as "the time of my life" signals that they are also disconnected from history, experiencing time only as their own (perpetual) present. Barthes's suggestion that the "intellectual class as a whole" becomes either "militant" or a "dandy" in particular historical situations identifies the aversion to political contestation which characterises dandyism. This aversion is discussed in relation to the situation of the avant-garde (drawing on Barthes's *Mythologies*), as Davis's projects contest aesthetics but not politics.

Davis's "dandyism" is a feature of his work which makes writing about him difficult, as it complicates the process of reading his tone. He affects particular styles by appropriating signifiers from history or contemporary culture and, because these styles are self-conscious poses, it is often impossible to attribute particular significance to them. He often deploys this material in eclectic and ideologically inconsistent ways, flagrantly using cultural information to construct a determinedly slippery, fashion-conscious persona. This is, of course, a deliberate strategy on Davis's part, and it demonstrates his awareness of the contingency of his subject position — he's letting us know that he knows he's just an accumulation of discourses. Slipperiness, knowingness and self-

awareness are prominent features of Davis's work, and they are an effect of his double consciousness: he is a critic who is aware of literary theory and the operational habits of postmodern literature, but at the same time he is a practitioner of this literature. Because of this position, Davis is able, in a sense, to pre-empt the critical writing of others about his work through his dandyish (and thus almost *unreadable*) pose.

The difficulty of determining Davis's tone is one aspect of a more general problem for a critic trying to produce material about him. The diversity of Davis's sources, the speed with which he moves between them, and the denseness of his allusive patterning makes it tricky to get critical traction with his texts, particularly his poetry. The complexity of *Willy's Gazette* is such that innumerable potential readings are available to the critic, and doubtless there are many profitable lines of inquiry which have been overlooked in my study. However, it is this complexity that provides the fulcrum for my investigation of the *Gazette*. After struggling for the better part of two years with this text, trying to draw coherence from the cultural jungle that comprises the *Gazette*, I discovered that exploring the text's resistance to my analysis, considering the way in which it constantly frustrated my reading, was what provided me with the richest vein of information about Davis's project. Addressing myself to the questions of how and, more crucially *why* the text alienated me, enabled me to overcome that alienation.

I do not mean to suggest by this that I have "cracked" *Willy's Gazette*. It is a rich text that could sustain many readings, of which mine is only one. Indeed, my argument hinges in part on the notion that the *Gazette* is constructed in such a way that to read it is always to *mis*-read it. What I do wish to signal is that the text's slipperiness, its "dandyism," its constant movement and its density made it very hard to find a satisfactory way of positioning myself in relation to it.

Having found an approach to the text which I am comfortable with, therefore, has been something of a personal triumph.

My thesis employs an exploratory approach to *Willy's Gazette*, and it is not intended in any sense to be either monolithic or reductive. In response to the radical diffuseness of the *Gazette* I have subjected the text to a narrowly focussed reading. This reading of the *Gazette* has its sights set on the (related) notions of speed and history which, in my opinion, are revealingly connected with the text's complexity. The selection of these keywords is not arbitrary, as has been indicated above. Davis foregrounds his interest in history throughout his critical writing, and his valorisation of speed and instantaneity is also readily apparent. This discussion is an investigation into how these interests are manifest in the *Gazette*, and what more can be gleaned about their significance from their articulation in Davis's poetry. In particular, Davis's employment of speed as a means of destabilising the subject position of Willy, and the connection between Davis's valorisation of speed, Barthes's "Jet-man," and the Futurist project is investigated.

It is appropriate at this point to engage in a degree of hand-wringing about the partial, subjective nature of my analysis, apologetically signalling that I can't help but perform an *interested* inquiry, despite the best of intentions. In fact, I can't claim to have intended anything other than a politically interested study. My own politics are close to the surface throughout this thesis, and clearly they do not sit comfortably with the politics of those who, like Davis, regard the market model as "socially responsible" (Interview with the author 186). I locate myself politically in a somewhat strident manner, but it is my opinion that the question I'm asking is a political one, and therefore it requires a political answer. I can't conceal my anger about the social consequences of the economic reforms which began during the 1980s, so I don't conceal it. I don't profess to have

produced a politically neutral reading of Davis's work because I don't feel that such a thing would be (for me, at least) either possible or desirable. This is proffered, then, as *one* way of reading Davis's work between 1983 and 1985. I hope that where the partiality of my position is problematic, it will encourage debate about Davis's projects during the cultural and political upheavals of the '80s, which have thus far received too little attention.

Chapter One

**"THIS IS HISTORY AND THERE ARE BIG
PATTERNS HERE"**

Willy's Gazette 21.

(i) Politics and Postmodernism

One of the most polemical writers on the question of postmodernism's political implications is the American Marxist Fredric Jameson. Certain features of Jameson's portrayal of postmodern culture warrant particular attention, as they will have work to do in relation to Davis's critical and poetic corpus. Jameson's use of "pastiche" and "schizophrenia" to explain postmodern art practice is one such feature. The emergence of both "pastiche" and "schizophrenia" is, for Jameson, symptomatic of the loss of historical consciousness which he attributes to postmodernism. As Jameson sees the "disappearance of a sense of history" and its results as being "closely related to the emergence of this new moment of late, consumer or multinational capitalism" ("Postmodernism and Consumer Society" 125), it seems fitting to address this material in some detail, in order that his conclusions can be compared to the evidence found in Davis's work. Moreover, given the prominence Davis accords to history, the influence of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets evident in his criticism and poetry, his use of bricolage, and the capricious nature of the character of Willy in *Willy's Gazette*, Jameson's discussion is particularly pertinent.

In "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" Jameson employs the concepts of "pastiche" and "schizophrenia" to describe trends in the arts that, in his view, correspond to cultural changes that characterise consumer capitalism (111-25). Jameson argues that parody, the mimicry of a particular style in order "to cast ridicule on the private nature of these stylistic mannerisms and their excessiveness or eccentricity with respect to the way people normally speak or write," has been replaced in postmodern culture by pastiche (113). This has occurred, he suggests, because postmodernism has specifically challenged the notion of a "linguistic norm" in comparison with which other styles can be "mocked" (114). It is no longer assumed that there is an identifiable way in

which "people normally speak or write." In an environment of increasing "stylistic diversity and heterogeneity," "parody has become impossible." He states that the "immense fragmentation and privatization" of literature can be seen as "foreshadow[ing] deeper and more general tendencies in social life as a whole." The development of "private code[s] or idiolect[s]" by particular groups has as its culmination "each individual coming to be a kind of linguistic island, separated from everyone else" (114).

Jameson also suggests that the rise of pastiche has occurred as a response to the "aesthetic dilemma" caused by the "death of the subject" (114-15). This dilemma exists because, "if the experience and the ideology of the unique self . . . which informed the stylistic practice of classical modernism, is over and done with, then it is no longer clear what the artists and writers of the present period are supposed to be doing." The artistic project is further problematised by a "sense in which the artists and writers of the present day will no longer be able to invent new styles and worlds." In this new climate, where the individual is considered to be a purely ideological notion, and where innovation is no longer possible, art must draw its styles from other work (in other words, it becomes pastiche), and in this way it becomes more determinedly art "about art itself" (115). For Jameson, the logical conclusion of this is "the failure of art and the aesthetic, the failure of the new, the imprisonment of the past" (116).

The art form he uses to substantiate his argument about pastiche is the "nostalgia film." Jameson suggests that even films with contemporary settings "conspir[e] to blur that immediate contemporary reference" by alluding (through plots, character types and visual styles) to earlier works. They are designed to be read as "a narrative set in some indefinable nostalgic past . . . beyond history," and thus they are evidence that postmodern culture is "incapable of dealing with time and history" (117). This understanding of

pastiche as a symptom of our lack of a sense of history is discussed elsewhere by Jameson. In an interview with Anders Stephanson, Jameson characterises the proliferation of references to history and nostalgia in postmodern culture as "substitutes for any genuine historical consciousness" (18). He asserts that such references (for example, those in nostalgia films) are not "historical", and that they repress the "historical consciousness" Jameson idealises:

they are images, simulacra, and pastiches of the past. They are effectively a way of satisfying a chemical craving for historicity, using a product that substitutes for and blocks it. (18)

Because of this desire for "historicity," images of the past are highly marketable, and thus become increasingly dominant.

Jameson goes on to describe these representations of the past as "fashion-plate images that entertain no determinable ideological relationship to other moments of time," and again as "the eclectic use of dead languages" (18-19). According to Jameson, the images "cannibalized" for the purposes of nostalgia film are generally taken from a "depoliticized era." He suggests that when "unconsciously political drives reawaken" they are "contained" through representations of more politically charged times (19), and thus political consciousness is, like historical consciousness, replaced by mythified images. Naomi Klein documents instances in fashion design which illustrate this appropriative practice. She quotes from a report on the "spring 1998 Prada collection," revealing the discrepancy between the historical images exploited and the ends to which they are being used:

The collection, a sort of Maoist/Soviet-worker chic full of witty period references, was shown in a Prada-blue room in the Prada

family palazzo to an exclusive few. (84)

The class struggle, then, has been refigured and romanticised. However, as the images of revolution are made palatable to the wealthiest, the ideological content of the past they represent is lost. As they become simulacra, they have been depoliticised. The relationship between Davis's use of historical images and those documented by Jameson and Klein will be discussed in the following chapters.

The demise of historical consciousness, reflected by the reduction of history to a series of "images" and "styles," is also related to what Jameson terms "schizophrenia." Jameson adopts Lacan's explanation of schizophrenia as a result of "the failure of the infant to accede fully into the realm of speech and language" ("Postmodernism" 118). Simply put, Jameson explains schizophrenia (in structural terms) as "the breakdown of the relationship between signifiers" (119). This linguistic problem has as one of its effects the destruction of the schizophrenic's sense of time and history:

It is because language has a past and a future, because the sentence moves in time, that we can have what seems to us a concrete or lived experience of time. But since the schizophrenic does not know language articulation in that way, he or she does not have our experience of temporal continuity either, but is condemned to live in a perpetual present . . . schizophrenic experience is an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence. (119)

As a result of this, the schizophrenic does not have a sense of "personal identity," as this is dependent on a notion of "the persistence of the 'I' and the

'me' over time" (119). Jameson relates these features (metaphorically) to literature by suggesting that the "schizophrenic breakdown of language" switches attention from the relationship between signifiers to "a more literalizing attention to those words" (120). As the focus shifts from the "meaning" of a word to its "materiality" it becomes an "image," and Jameson goes on to compare this to the language poetry project (121-22).¹ Certainly the emphasis on words themselves, on the surface of the text and its operational habits rather than what it seeks to represent, corresponds with the work of the language poets. However Jameson extends his description of language writing as "schizophrenic," stating that "the experience of temporal discontinuity" is central to language poetry (122). This comparison is made with a number of qualifications, as Jameson acknowledges that the poem he uses as his exemplar, Bob Perelman's "China," does not wholly support his thesis:

[n]ow one may object that this is not exactly schizophrenic writing in the clinical sense; it does not seem quite right to say that these sentences are free-floating material signifiers whose signifieds have evaporated. (123)

Although Jameson's position seems rather conjectural, it will later serve as one model that can be adopted to assist a reading of *Willy's Gazette*.

The "disappearance of a sense of history" is central to the connection between "pastiche" and "schizophrenia" — which Jameson refers to as "formal features" of postmodernism — and consumer capitalism. In Jameson's view society has started to "lose its capacity to retain its own past," and this loss can be identified

¹ Jameson's discussion treats "Language" and "New Sentence" poetics as synonymous terms. He identifies Perelman's "'group' or 'school'" as the "Language Poets," then goes on to describe their "experiments with what they like to call the 'New Sentence'" (121). In fact the New Sentence school is a subset of the Language movement.

in the "media saturation of news," whereby recent events recede rapidly into the past (125). This can be compared with his description of other changes in social life:

[n]ew types of consumption; planned obsolescence; an ever more rapid rhythm of fashion and styling changes; the penetration of advertising, television and the media generally to a hitherto unparalleled degree throughout society. (124)

In light of the parallel between these changes and "the transformation of reality into images, [and] the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents" effected by postmodern art, one can sense a correlation between postmodernism and the ethos of consumer culture. The prominence of the image appropriated and reproduced by increasingly rapid, diverse and powerful media, and the commodification of "historical" styles redesignated as "retro," are obvious examples of this point of intersection.

A particular site of this affiliation between postmodernism and consumerism is advertising, which, as Jameson notes, "is fed by postmodernism in all the arts and is inconceivable without it" (124). Advertising, like postmodernism, cannibalises the images of the past, transforming recognisable historical figures into marketable commodities (in the case of postmodernism, the market in question is the art market, which Jameson believes drives our understanding of artistic merit: "our sense of value, in a good as well as a bad sense, is given to us by the art market" ["Regarding Postmodernism — A Conversation with Fredric Jameson" 28]²). The proclivity of advertisers for exploiting counter-culture figures for the purposes of marketing demonstrates the way in which

² Cf. Davis, "Valuing the Culture — More on New Right Thinking and the Cultural Sector: Where am I in Relation to the Market?" *Midwest* 4, 1994: 10-12. See also interview with the author 182-84.

oppositionality has been redefined as a desirable mainstream attribute: William Burroughs was used to advertise Nike; James Dean and Jack Kerouac sold Gap trousers (Klein 45). Images of Gandhi and Einstein were used in a marketing campaign for Apple computers, and the slogan for this campaign, "Think Different," was itself an overt promotion of the notion of resistance. The way in which Davis's own projects employ these marketing strategies — the punk aesthetic of *And* and Willy's miming of "radical chic" (*Willy's Gazette* 19)³ for example — will be discussed in detail in the second and third chapters.

The relationship between advertising and postmodernism poses a question for Jameson about the "critical value of the newer art" (125). Where modernism can be described as "critical, negative, contestatory, subversive, [or] oppositional" in its relation to the culture from which it emerged, postmodernism apparently "replicates or reproduces — reinforces" the dominant cultural system (125). Jameson points out that even art forms that are designed to challenge notions of social acceptability (he cites "punk rock" and "sexually explicit material") are not only tolerated but are eminently marketable (124). In both advertising and art resistance has become commodified, and oppositional figures have been used to create marketable images. In such an environment, how, or perhaps more pertinently, *to what* can postmodern art be resistant?

Jameson's article appeared in a 1983 collection of essays edited by Hal Foster, *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*.⁴ The year of publication of this text is suggestive in the context of this thesis, as it coincides with the publication

³ *Willy's Gazette* does not have page numbers. The numbers used to navigate through the text have been imposed by this reader. I have left Davis's prefatory "Note" unpagged, and refer to it simply as "Note." I have numbered the sonnets 1-97.

⁴ This essay was originally prepared as a talk, and was presented as a lecture in 1982. These ideas were later developed in the essay "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," which appeared in *New Left Review* (146, 1984, 53-92), and also in his 1991 book of the same name.

of both *Willy's Gazette* and the first issue of *And*. Another essay in this volume, written by Edward Said, addresses the political implications of contemporary theory in a different manner from Jameson, and his essay provides another productive frame for analysing Davis's project. Said's approach to the problem is to consider the social function of criticism, as he suggests that the contemporary academy is isolated from the realities of political life. Although the environment Said is concerned with is that of North American universities, it is useful to briefly survey his comments in order to compare them to the New Zealand context. In "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community" Said describes one of the factors that causes this isolation as "the cult of expertise and professionalism" (136). This "cult" privileges the authority of "experts," thus foreclosing the possibility of discussion about "crucial policy questions" by those who are not "insiders" (136). Said considers that this has increasingly "restricted [the] scope of vision" of critics, and has led to the growth of a "doctrine of non-interference among fields" (136). Thus literary critics like Said are expected to apply theory to "*literary* texts" rather than to the work of "experts" in other fields, such as documents of government policy (146). Moreover, the sequestering of disciplines means that the critical literature produced by academics tends only to be read by others in the same field. Said claims that certain types of literary criticism have "virtually abandoned any attempt at reaching a large, if not a mass, audience," despite the original impulse of these criticisms, which was to open literature up to a wider audience "who might otherwise have been frightened off by their lack of professional literary accreditation" (139-40). The primary question for Said is how one finds a "humanistic antidote" to the situation where academics "speak only to and for each other," in a discourse insulated from pressing social issues (143).

Reader-response criticism is identified by Said as one contemporary model that exaggerates the separation of academic work from society. With the exception

of Stanley Fish and his work on "interpretive communities," Said characterises reader-response critics as "regard[ing] interpretation as an essentially private, interiorized happening, thereby inflating the role of solitary decoding at the expense of its just as important social context" (142). Although the notion of the "interpretive community" acknowledges the role of "groups" and "institutions" in the way a text is read, Said considers that Fish fails to account for the way that authority attaches to particular interpretations. For Said, the problem of the privileged and isolated interpretive community of literary critics remains (142-43).

Marxist literary criticism is also guilty of operating in this insular manner, according to Said. Discussing Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*, Said identifies a problematic "dichotomy between two kinds of 'Politics'" (147). These are the politics "defined by political theory," and the politics "of struggle and power in the everyday world" (147). Said suggests that Jameson treats these as "autonomous realms," perpetuating the "discursive separation" of theory and practice (148). Although Terry Eagleton criticises Jameson for the "practical ineffectiveness of his Marxist-structuralism," Said notes that both work in the field of literary Marxism, and thus they "speak its language, [and] deal only with its problematics" (149). Said describes Eagleton, Frank Lentricchia and Jameson as "literary Marxists who write for literary Marxists, who are in cloistral seclusion from the inhospitable world of real politics" (149). Again the "field" in question is "defined principally as an academic discourse," and the "extra-academic outside world" is left to its own devices (149).

Interestingly, Lentricchia addresses this problem of the isolation of theory from praxis, but in relation to deconstruction rather than Marxism (206). Questioning the utility of deconstructive analyses of the "rhetoric of authority," Lentricchia describes their irrelevance for those who are excluded from rarefied academic

discourse:

It may be very true that authority stands on an abyss, but in the meanwhile the woman at the A & P is making two dollars an hour and has six kids to feed, and her boss doesn't know that the authority of his rhetoric stands on an abyss and probably wouldn't give a shit if one of us told him so. (206)

Clearly, in Said's view, a similar statement could be made about the efficacy of a purely theoretical Marxist criticism.

According to Said, the corollary of the humanities' "*noninterference*" in social and political matters, and the consolidation of "fields" into "self-policing, self-purifying communities," is that the humanities "represent humane marginality, which is . . . to preserve and if possible to conceal the hierarchy of powers that occupy the centre, [and] define the social terrain" (155). This position allows "the deployment of free-floating abstractions (scholarship, taste, tact, humanism) that are defined in advance as indefinable" and the employment of "theory" as a "discourse of occultation and legitimation" in criticism (155-56). Furthermore, the principle of "self-regulation" among the "institutional humanities" is seen by Said as "allow[ing] and in a sense encourag[ing] the unrestrained operation of market forces that were traditionally thought of as subject to ethical and philosophical review" (156). His broad characterisation of the ethos of "noninterference" is that it is "*laissez-faire*" (156).

Writing in 1982, in Reagan's America, Said relates the "*laissez-faire*" attitude of the humanities to "a counterattack by 'highly mobilized business elites' in reaction to the immediately preceding period during which national needs were thought of as fulfilled by resources allocated collectively and democratically"

(156). He cites David Dickson and David Noble, who claim that corporate elites, in conjunction with "foundations, think tanks, sectors of the academy, and the government," "proclaimed a new age of reason while remystifying reality" (qtd. 156). Dickson and Noble set out four "epistemological and ideological imperatives" through which this was effected, and Said describes these as an "extrapolation" of his notion of "noninterference" (156). These imperatives can be briefly outlined as follows: 1) the "rediscovery" of liberal economics; 2) the "reinvention" of progress, termed "innovation"; 3) the prioritising of "efficiency," "manageability," "governability," "rationality," and "competence" over democratic principles; and 4) the "restoration" of "expert" opinion to a position of authority, and the "use of science as legitimation for social policy," in part facilitated by ties to the academy and policy think tanks (qtd. 156).⁵

Said relates these imperatives to literary criticism, suggesting that the promotion of the "self-regulating" market and "free enterprise" implies that "literary criticism minds its own business and is 'free' to do what it wishes with no community responsibility whatever" (156). Criticism thus becomes increasingly isolated from social life. Moreover, the preoccupation with "progress," according to Said, has resulted in innovation for its own sake, and what he terms "indiscriminate publication" (156).⁶

Ultimately, Said advocates a doctrine of "*interference*" as a remedy for the failure of criticism he describes (157). In order for this to take place "borders and obstacles," such as the specialisation of disciplines, must be crossed. One must also make "a determined attempt to generalize exactly at those points where generalizations seem impossible" (157). This echoes the sentiments of other critics, who have suggested that the abandonment of universals effected by

⁵ David Dixon and David Noble, "By Force of Reason: The Politics of Science and Policy," in *The Hidden Election*, ed. Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers, New York: Pantheon, 1981: 267.

⁶ For Davis's comments on Said's argument, see the interview with the author 185-91.

poststructuralism has left criticism ill-equipped to deal with the questions of practical politics. This difficulty clearly has implications for this thesis, as its object is, in a sense, to "interfere" with political discourse *through* criticism. It is useful to note, however, that the effacement of universals which poststructuralism demands also conflicts with Davis's political project, despite his celebration of poststructuralist theory. While the older humanist universals have been renounced, they have been replaced in the world of practical politics by a new totalising theory — the theory of the market.

In his introduction to *Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism*, Andrew Ross considers some of the features of postmodernism that apparently enable or bolster right wing politics. As the title indicates, the essays in this volume are concerned with the political implications of the abrogation of universalising claims of Enlightenment philosophy. Discussing the growing recognition of poststructuralism as "a belated response to the vanguardist innovations of high modernism," he suggests that it still exhibits "many of the elitist strains so characteristic of the modernist heyday" (ix-x). Although poststructuralism "earned its radical credentials" through its critique of institutional authority, it remains, in Ross's view, the preserve of the "privileged":

For privileged students . . . weaned on the monuments of modernist culture, poststructuralism seemed to make perfect sense: it made nothing strange. And for those less privileged, with little or less access to academically certified knowledge and information, its critical advocacy of negative capability — of withdrawing from traditionally empowered positions — could often only be read as a patronizing parody of their own lack of an empowered voice. (ix)

Related to this, another ostensibly democratising aspect of postmodernism is

the increasing utility of the "politics of appropriation" for marginalised groups. In an environment where "terms are by no means guaranteed their meanings" they can be adopted and redefined in order to support a particular position (xi). However, Ross notes that the positive outcomes of this practice are only available to a relatively limited constituency. He suggests that the "strategy" of appropriation appeals to those "closest to the center" such as "white, Western, middle class feminists," but can appear to be "a new kind of assimilation or collaboration" to those more removed from centres of power (xi). As a result, the discourse of those groups excluded from power often relies on the kind of "essentialist notion[s] of political identity" that postmodernism has sought to destabilise (xi). Ross proposes that postmodern politics should not discredit such essentialism, but should understand it as "*one* of the many subject positions that inform its radical pluralism," and recognise that

moments of 'identity' are historically effective (they are the result of a shared material and discursive history) and therefore have a concrete existence even when and where the political consistency of such moments may be theoretically untenable. (xi-xii)

The problems associated with this conflict between postmodernism and essentialist discourse is discussed in the context of feminism in Ross's book by Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson. They describe the parallel between the projects of postmodernism and feminism as a shared desire to "develop new paradigms of social criticism that do not rely on traditional philosophical underpinnings." However where postmodernism engages primarily with those "philosophical underpinnings," discrediting foundationalism and essentialism, feminism's preoccupation with social criticism causes it to "lapse" into those universalising habits (83-84). What is particularly interesting about Fraser and Nicholson's discussion is their critique of Lyotard, whose anti-foundational

stance leads him to regard certain types of social criticism (including “large-scale historical narrative and social-theoretical analyses of pervasive relations of dominance and subordination”) as “illegitimate” (89-90). Fraser and Nicholson remark that Lyotard’s attitude towards such models is predicated on his own metapolitical commitment to anti-totalitarianism (103 n.7). In their opinion, Lyotard wrongly assumes “that totalizing social and political theory necessarily eventuates in totalitarian societies,” and they suggest that the “practical intent” which is evidenced by this assumption is Lyotard’s “anti-Marxism.” This diagnosis, contained within a footnote, concludes by posing a contentious question, one which the authors decline to answer, as it is “too complicated” a digression — “[w]hether [Lyotard’s intent] should also be characterized as ‘neoliberalism’” (103 n.7).

This question is a provocative one, and one which this thesis must address. The advent of neoliberal economic policy in New Zealand and its relation to Davis will be discussed later in this chapter, but a brief and general statement can be made here. There is a semantic issue that must first be addressed however. As Chantal Mouffe points out, one of the difficulties for contemporary left criticism is the vagueness with which the term “liberal” has come to be used. While “liberal” in the context of economics refers to *laissez-faire* or free market models, it is also commonly used to describe permissive social attitudes. Mouffe makes a distinction between “economic liberalism” and “political liberalism,” terming the former “liberalism” and the latter “democracy.” In Mouffe’s opinion the failure to distinguish between these two notions, and the practice of “conflat[ing]” them under the term “liberalism,” forestalls critique of contemporary economic policy (32). The shifty behaviour of this term can be seen as a useful rhetorical device for advocates of economic liberalism, who demonstrate a canny ability for capturing territory through such manoeuvres — consider the “free market” and its opposition, the “siege economy.” In order

to avoid conflating or shifting between these two senses of the word, the term "liberal" will be used in this thesis in the sense of Mouffe's "political liberalism," or "democracy." Economic liberalism will be termed neoliberalism, monetarism, or New Right economic theory.

Neoliberalism as a political philosophy certainly depends on the rejection of "totalitarianism," and its rhetoric often displays a preoccupation with characterising government intervention in the economy as "Marxist" (and hence totalitarian). The desire to minimise government intervention is driven by a belief in the self-regulating capacity of the so-called free market, and as a result the neoliberal approach to policy development is often criticised for prioritising economic theory over social outcomes. This charge resonates with the statements made by Said and others about contemporary theorists' lack of engagement with social issues. The argument advanced by neoliberals is that the market model, if left to its own devices, will create wealth and alleviate socio-economic inequality. Adoption of the market model, therefore, can theoretically be a substitute for social policy that directly addresses such inequalities. The corollary of this is the rejection of arguments for policy that targets groups which suffer from disadvantage due to historical and systematic exclusion from power. These are the groups which Ross identifies as relying on "essentialist notions of political identity" as a means of combating their marginality (xi).

One can see then that poststructuralism's "universal abandon," its rejection of essentialism, and its desire to delegitimise "social-theoretical analyses of pervasive relations of dominance and subordination" (Fraser and Nicholson 90), has a certain utility for the neoliberal project. The abandonment of universals is an enabling device for those who wish to discredit the essentialist discourses of groups excluded from political authority. Poststructuralism's rejection of "large-

scale historical narratives" also parallels a feature of neoliberalism. Davis himself has spoken of this connection in relation to his work in *Treasury* and *And* magazine:

both [were] trying to say, 'let's get away from anecdotal, time-honoured, the past will write the future, kinds of discussion about these intangibles — public policy or art.' (Interview with the author 185)

(ii) The New Zealand Context

In order to bring these discussions about postmodernism to bear on the New Zealand context, and specifically on the work of Davis between 1983 and 1985, it is necessary to reflect on how appropriate the label "postmodern" is for the conditions at this time. In a 1985 article in *Landfall* Leonard Wilcox argues that critical writing about postmodernism in New Zealand demonstrates little awareness at this stage of contemporary debates overseas (344). Wilcox itemises some key features of postmodernism (derived from Jameson), including "depthlessness," the "simulacrum," the "eclipse of the subject," "pastiche," and "schizophrenic" writing, and suggests that these are "conspicuously absent" from New Zealand's literary discourse (344-45). The version of postmodernism Wilcox observes in New Zealand is outmoded, "bucolic," and heavily inflected by the continuing preoccupation with "defining a national identity" (346-47). Wilcox cites a distinction made by Gerald Graff between two "strains" of postmodernism: the early "healthy-minded, untroubled" variety, which celebrates the "liberation" postmodernism offers from "reactionary authority" and a "repressive past," and the later "darker, 'disillusioned'" postmodernism, which is concerned with the implications of the

"crisis of representation" (347). He argues that New Zealand remains locked into the early strain because it is not a "fully postmodern" society (348).

There are a number of reasons offered by Wilcox for this condition. One of these is that, despite the fact postmodernism has been identified by theorists as a "*post-nationalist* phenomenon," some "local variants" are "explicitly yoked" to the notion of "cultural nationalism." Moreover this post-nationalism is in part occasioned by the "eclipse of the power of nation states by multinational corporations," a trend not yet recognised in New Zealand in 1985 (347). For Wilcox, the Jamesonian analysis of the relationship between postmodernism and consumer capitalism is relevant to New Zealand's status as anti- rather than post-modern. Because New Zealand has "a small population, [a] declining economy," expensive "consumer goods," only two television stations and a "relative paucity of billboards," it is "not properly a consumer society" or "an image/media saturated society." The nation's enduring pastoralism is also an impediment to becoming a "postmodern culture," as "with its pastures full of sheep" and its "bias against modern metropolitan culture," it does not conform to Lyotard's imaginary of postmodernism, in which "data banks 'are nature for postmodern man'" (348).

Wilcox briefly discusses three little magazines of the early 1980s "devoted to postmodernism": *Parallax*, *And*, and *Splash* (349). His analysis is unfavourable — *Parallax*'s three issues attempted to "define postmodernism," *And* was "nominally influenced by continental criticism," and *Splash* had "no consistent theoretical direction." He criticises the "self-consciously" displayed postmodern features and the reliance on American popular culture and literature for both their notions of postmodernism and their images, despite their pronouncements about the emergence of an indigenous postmodern art and literature (349-50). While Wilcox's comments suggest that New Zealand's culture in 1985 was "post-

provincial," but not yet "postmodern," and that its critical discourse about postmodernism was naively ebullient, he concedes that some art and literature demonstrated the emergence of "postmodernist characteristics" (357).

These early, faltering steps towards postmodernism which Wilcox describes make this period particularly significant. Wilcox's assessment of the state of New Zealand's progress towards the postmodern in 1985 depends largely on his perception that the nation is isolated from the forces of Jameson's global consumer capitalism and media saturation. In response to this I would argue that the early 1980s mark a crucial phase of transition away from that isolation in both cultural and economic terms. The embryonic state in which Wilcox finds postmodernism in 1985 is paralleled by the growth of the "more market" tendencies of economic policy. Wilcox states that New Zealand critics "view postmodernism as liberating *per se*, the path toward an authentic indigenous culture," and thus fail to engage with its more troubling aspects (namely, the crisis of representation) (361). Significantly, the prophets of the New Right revolution celebrated that theoretical shift as a liberation from repressive protectionism, and as a means of attaining national self-determination, free from the colonial ties to Britain.⁷ While there is some validity in the claim that the reforms of the '80s were part of the process of decolonisation, in this sphere too the implications of the new orthodoxy for the (political) subject were disregarded.

The late 1970s and early 1980s was a period of immense social, political and intellectual upheaval in New Zealand. The culture of change was spurred by various factors, and the origins of these currents can be found in global trends over the decades following World War Two. Much of the impulse for change

⁷ Colin James's analysis represents the reforms in this way. See *New Territory: The Transformation of New Zealand, 1984-1992*, Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1991.

was initiated by the social and political transitions taking place in both the United States and the United Kingdom. American social movements of the 1950s and 1960s, such as the Civil Rights campaign, the sexual revolution, and anti-Vietnam activism found their way into the New Zealand consciousness, informing the Maori radicalism of the 1970s, and a greater awareness about pressing social issues generally.

The growth of American corporate supremacy throughout the Cold War years, and the consequent growth of consumerism, paved the way for the theories of fiscal management which characterised the New Right in America (Chafe 117-22). The conservatives, appalled by what they perceived as the excessive liberalism of politics during the 1960s, mobilised during the late 1970s to counter policies such as affirmative action, the abolition of prayer in schools, the sanctioning of abortion, as well as the feminist revolution and "attitudes of permissiveness" towards pornography and sexual freedom (461-63). This New Right movement saw the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, and with it the introduction of "Reaganomics" (465). This shift to neoliberal economic policy also occurred in the United Kingdom in the late 1970s and early 1980s under Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

In New Zealand, the economic orthodoxy of the New Right found its footing through a different constituency. Appropriately enough for a country whose national identity is conventionally described in terms of rugby culture and pastoralism, the catalysts for political change were a rugby tour and a decline in agricultural exports. In 1981, protests against the Springbok tour polarised New Zealand society, as the liberal opposition to the South African policy of apartheid, and the national love of rugby clashed violently. The protests were an expression not only of anti-apartheid sentiment, but of growing frustration with the administration of Prime Minister Robert Muldoon. Muldoon's

government, which supported the tour, became the focus of the liberal attack on the status quo, and the Prime Minister himself became a symbol of conservative narrow-mindedness about social issues.⁸ In liberal and intellectual circles Muldoon was, as Leigh Davis says, "somebody everyone loved to hate" (Interview with the author 187). He was (at that time) a common enemy for Maori, Pakeha liberals, and academics who saw him as an embodiment of New Zealand's anti-intellectual culture.

In *Willy's Gazette*, which will be discussed in chapter three, the anti-tour protests are represented as Willy's "VERY FIRST POLITICAL FEELING" (21). For a member of Davis's generation (born 1955), the tour is likely to have been their first experience of political activism. For the community more generally the protests were the strongest expression of political feeling in recent history. An important feature of the tour protests was the way in which groups with different political ideologies converged in order to attack the South African apartheid regime, also contesting the bloody-minded obstinacy of both the Rugby Union and Muldoon. The issue drew together the liberal middle classes, activists, gang members, and more curiously the neoliberal New Right, who objected to Muldoon's deeply conservative social and economic policies. Jane Kelsey suggests that by the late 1970s Muldoon had become "out of touch with the changing times" (20-22). These "changing times" were the result of the protest movements which began to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s, such as the anti-Vietnam, anti-apartheid, environmental, anti-nuclear, feminist, homosexual law reform, and Maori land movements. By the time Muldoon came to power in 1975, New Zealand culture had become dramatically more progressive, yet he remained intractably conservative on social issues. The anti-tour protests were both the culmination of years of widespread dissatisfaction and a watershed, as the country was violently divided in full view of the international

⁸ Davis discusses Muldoon's "symbolic" significance in the interview with the author 187.

community. Kelsey writes: "Muldoon's authoritarian response [to the anti-tour protests] bolstered demands from diverse groups for political, economic and cultural change" (22).

Although the intellectual Left were generally opposed to Muldoon's conservative approach towards social issues, they also had a deeper antipathy towards the culture Muldoon represented. The dominant historical understanding of Pakeha "identity" was predicated on a deep distrust of anything theoretical (Horrocks "No Theory Permitted on these Premises" 119-23). Pragmatism and common sense were the tenets Muldoon preached, affirming the no. 8 fencing wire conception of "kiwis" as practical, straight-talking, no-nonsense types. Any attempts at intellectual critique or theorisation were dismissed by Muldoon as "intellectual snobbery" (qtd. Horrocks "No Theory" 120).⁹ "Theory" was described as dogma, evangelism, or an unhealthy fetishisation of effete foreign cultures, while Muldoon's own position was that of a "typical New Zealander" (qtd. Horrocks "No Theory" 120).¹⁰ It has been noted that Muldoon's "freedom-from-theory" was itself "heavily theoretical" (Horrocks "No Theory" 120).¹¹ His ridicule of the intellectual left, and his appeal to the mythical "typical New Zealander" were calculated to strengthen anti-intellectual prejudices, and thus diffuse/defuse the power of the theory-mongers to critique his untheorised political agenda.¹²

In Alex Calder's memoir of *And*, "And then: the fortunes of a little magazine," he writes of the early 1980s:

⁹ Robert Muldoon, *My Way*, Wellington: Reed, 1971: 127-28.

¹⁰ Robert Muldoon, *Muldoon by Muldoon*, Wellington: Reed, 1977: 97.

¹¹ See also Tim Hazledine: 24.

¹² Hazledine argues that economic Rationalists have similarly exploited anti-intellectual prejudice in order to undermine criticism of the structural adjustment programme, despite the heavy theorisation of their own agenda. 20; 24.

These were the last years of the Muldoon regime, and there were in fact two Treasuries, one that did its master's bidding, another, in a high state of intellectual excitement, preoccupied with conceptual retooling and alternative schemes. (4)

This division of the department between the old and new economic orthodoxies was due largely to the mediocre performance of the New Zealand economy immediately before and during the Muldoon years. Muldoon, though deeply conservative on social issues, was aligned with the economic policies of the first Labour government, supporting a controlled and regulated economy, and believing in the welfare state (Jesson "Politics: In our time" 217). The apparent failure of Muldoon's "Think Big" policies gave the New Right economists a reference point for their criticism of his fiscal policies.

Kelsey notes that in the 1960s and 1970s New Zealand's agricultural exports to Britain, on which the economy had been heavily dependent, diminished as Britain imported more from Europe, a trend which accelerated following Britain's entry into the European Community.¹³ Muldoon was unresponsive to the imperatives of the changing global economy, and his "[c]ostly attempts to build energy self-sufficiency and [his] resistance to change" resulted in climbing unemployment, debt and inflation. Muldoon's priority however was to consolidate his political support through policies that were ultimately detrimental to the economy, such as subsidies, extravagant superannuation schemes, and minimum price guarantees for the rural sector (24). In the years between the Springbok tour and the 1984 election there was a call for change from economic pundits whose imaginations had been captured by the free-market model. The "conceptual retooling and alternative schemes" with which

¹³ Cf. Colin James, who identifies Britain's entry into the European Community in 1972 as a crucial marker of "New Zealand's economic decolonisation." James, *New Territory*: 47.

the "new school" Treasury was preoccupied were the basis for the programme of structural adjustment embarked upon by the fourth Labour government in 1984. Although these economic reforms are commonly known as "Rogernomics," after Roger Douglas, the Minister of Finance who began the reform programme, the impulse originated within the Treasury itself. As Bruce Jesson puts it, "Roger Douglas was a creation of Rogernomics rather than the other way around" ("Politics" 119).¹⁴

The combined frustration of social activists, the intellectual community and supporters of neoliberal economics saw Muldoon ousted in 1984 and the fourth Labour government come to power. The social movements made considerable headway under Labour, and the intellectual Left were relieved at the more liberal social policies. The economic theorists in Treasury had presented a model for restructuring the New Zealand economy in their briefing to the incoming Finance Minister, and using the economic "crisis" to explain the need for radical change, this programme was implemented with extraordinary rapidity (Jesson *Behind the Mirror Glass* 133).¹⁵

This swift execution of the Treasury's recommendations proved to be an effective strategy for deflecting or pre-empting criticism of the structural adjustment programme. Douglas's 1993 book *Unfinished Business*, which (echoing his antagonist, Muldoon) offers "practical policies and politics rather than theory and rhetoric" (cover blurb), describes the essential principles of effective reform. One of these principles is particularly instructive when considering the revolution of the mid-1980s, especially as it accrues significance in my discussion of Davis's project of literary reform. This is the principle of

¹⁴See also Jesson, *Behind the Mirror Glass: The Growth of Wealth and Power in New Zealand in the Eighties*: 124.

¹⁵Hazledine suggests that while the Muldoon-induced "crisis" provided vindication for the structural adjustment programme, it was not the *raison d'être* for the reforms. 29.

"speed." Douglas suggests that one should "implement reform in quantum leaps," rather than "a step at a time," in order that "interest groups" are unable to "mobilise and drag you down" (220-21). "Speed," Douglas argues, is "essential," and it is "almost impossible to go too fast." Again the objective of this is to prevent the "mobilis[ation] of public opinion against the reforms" (222-23). On the same theme, Douglas also prioritises "momentum," stating that "the fire of opponents is much less accurate if they have to shoot at a moving target" (224-25). While these comments are explanatory of the operations of the Treasury and Finance Ministry in the 1980s, they also have a bearing on Davis's work in *Willy's Gazette* and *And*, both of which display an enthusiasm for and a heroics of speed.

The new economic theory taking hold in Treasury in the early 1980s had its origins in the writings of British and American economists. Two of the most influential, Viennese-born British theorist Friedrich Hayek, and Milton Friedman of the Chicago school, both produced powerful neoliberal critiques of Keynesian economics, claiming that the policies of stabilisation had failed in the years following World War Two (Blyth 14). They advocated the adoption of monetarist policies, involving a reduction of state intervention in the workings of the market. Hayek, whom Kelsey identifies as the biggest influence on New Zealand's liberalisation programme (61), was opposed not only to government regulation of incomes and prices, but also to government attempts to plan economic development at all, as he believed such interference led only to distortion of the economy (Blyth 15). The function of monetary policy was to minimise inflation, and in New Zealand a 0-2% inflation target was pursued through the raising of interest rates, resulting in a level of unemployment sufficient to depress wages (Barry *In a Land of Plenty*). Through this reduction of state interference in the economy, monetarist theory proposes a fundamental alteration of the relationship between the government and society. Collectivity

and welfare provision, ideas central to Keynesianism, are abandoned in favour of radical individualism, where the "unfettered free market" allows "individuals to pursue — and attain — their own interests" (Miskin 2). This shift is perhaps best represented through Margaret Thatcher's notorious proclamation: "There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families."¹⁶

The philosophy of the deregulated free market was endorsed in the Treasury's *Economic Management*, presented to the newly elected Finance Minister in July 1984. This document, according to Brian Easton, "had a total commitment to more-market," but was "only edging towards the full Chicago school position" of monetarism (*The Commercialisation of New Zealand* 94). Its advocacy of monetarist theory is not as "wholehearted" as the 1987 briefing *Government Management* (20). This later volume, written when Treasury was at "the height of its self-confidence," takes a more purely neoliberal position, applying the theory to all policy areas and including a chapter devoted solely to the discussion of economic theory (Barry Interview with the author). Nevertheless, *Economic Management* is a highly significant text in terms of New Zealand's political history, and also in relation to this thesis, as Davis was directly involved in its production.

(iii) Davis in Treasury

Davis began working at Treasury in June 1980, and remained there until moving to the merchant banking firm Fay Richwhite in 1985. During this period a change in the personnel employed by the department was occurring, and this is seen by some commentators as a major factor in the shift from

¹⁶ This statement was made by Thatcher in *Woman's Own*, 31 October 1987. Cited in *The Oxford Dictionary of Twentieth Century Quotations*.

Keynesian to monetarist theory. Two factors are notable in regard of the staff employed by Treasury in the early 1980s. Jesson observes that Treasury employed a large number of recent graduates from the Economics department at the University of Canterbury, where an international authority on "market economics," Professor Richard Manning, was highly influential (Jesson *Mirror Glass* 120). The change which is more relevant to this thesis however is the practice of employing high-achieving graduates who had no training in economics. It was under this programme that Davis, a brilliant thinker with a Master's degree in English, was employed. This scheme, which aimed to attract the "best and brightest" from a range of disciplines into the Treasury, was promoted as a means of bringing highly developed analytical skills, lateral thinking, and different perspectives to the process of policy making.

Another interpretation of this practice is that it reduced the proportion of staff trained in Keynesian economics, which was at this time still prevalent in most New Zealand universities other than Canterbury. By employing people with no experience of economic theory, and no prior commitment to a particular economic model, those in authority at the Treasury were arguably able to shape the views of their new recruits as they chose (Barry Interview with the author). The key figures in Treasury during the formative stages of the New Right revolution, Roger Kerr, Graeme Scott, Rob Cameron and Bryce Wilkinson, were able to present neoliberal economic theory to their protégés as the only practical response to New Zealand's lack of growth, a rhetorical tactic employed in their relations with the government.¹⁷ Whether the Treasury's recruitment criteria were predicated on such a programme of indoctrination or not, what is significant about the period of Davis's tenure is the dramatic shift in the

¹⁷ These men are frequently identified by commentators as influential in the reform process. Roger Kerr led the Treasury think-tank "Economics II," which included the others named, and was responsible for both *Economic Management* (1984) and *Government Management* (1987). See Kelsey 47. Also Jesson, *Behind the Mirror Glass* 124.

department's policy advice.

Economic Management was prepared at short notice in 1984 after Muldoon announced a snap election. Although the briefing paper was written before the National Party's defeat, its staunch advocacy of market economics demonstrates the expectation of a Labour victory and the appointment of Roger Douglas as Finance Minister.¹⁸ That the New Right reforms were implemented by the Labour Party is an irony that has been much discussed. Aside from some general comments pertaining to the significance of the snap election and Treasury's statutory position of political neutrality, this matter falls outside the scope of this thesis. Jesson describes the Labour Party's sponsorship of Treasury's economic model as the result of a "bureaucratic coup." The snap election caught Labour without a coherent economic policy. Although Roger Douglas was already a convert to monetarism, the economic policy Labour released before the election contained an awkward mixture of neoliberal and Keynesian theory (*Mirror Glass* 121-22). This lack of a coherent policy position was symptomatic of Labour's failure to engage with economic theory. Jesson states that the "lack of resistance" to the reform programme was due to the "absence of ideology, and a lack of interest in economics" among Labour Party members, who were often activists interested in "liberal causes," and had a "moral rather than an intellectual" motivation (123). In this ideological vacuum, the only members of Labour's caucus with strongly held views about economic policy (Douglas, Richard Prebble and David Caygill) were able to dominate discussion, and present the reforms as necessary and moderate to their colleagues (123). The pressure of the snap election, combined with the economic crisis proclaimed by Treasury, led the Labour Party to adopt the

¹⁸ Muldoon had held the Finance portfolio during National's time in office, and would have dismissed Treasury's proposals in *Economic Management* outright had he been re-elected. As Jesson says, "Muldoon would have had a fit if it had been presented to him." *Behind the Mirror Glass* 122.

recommendations contained in *Economic Management* as government policy.

In contrast with the practical focus on social outcomes that had characterised economic policy since the election of Savage's first Labour government in 1935, the position taken by Treasury in *Economic Management* was deeply ideological. As Miskin notes:

Pro-market ideas were not presented in relation to outcomes or the demonstrable efficiency or inefficiency of the market as a creator of wealth or a regulator of goods and services, "rather they were argued in relation to beliefs, to ideology." The market was given a moral authority; it was *a priori* "good" rather than a good which was a consequence of what it could and did deliver. (29-30)¹⁹

This shift from a focus on social outcomes to pure theory is a crucial feature of the neoliberal reform programme.²⁰ An aspect of interest is the parallel that can be drawn between the shift in literary theory away from the "real," away from an interest in experience and its representation, toward abstraction. Jameson remarks briefly on this comparison, in relation to one of the off-shoots of the free market, one in which Davis has gone on to be involved — the finance sector:

the apparent return to some finance capitalism with dizzying edifices of credit and paper no longer reposing on the infrastructure or 'ground' of real production offers some peculiar analogies to current (poststructuralist) theory itself. ("Regarding

¹⁹ The quote is taken from John Deeks, "Introduction: Business, Government and Pressure Group Politics," in Deeks and Nick Perry (eds), *Controlling Interests: Business, the State and Society in New Zealand* Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1992: 10.

²⁰ This is eloquently explored in relation to unemployment in New Zealand in Alister Barry *In a Land of Plenty*.

Postmodernism" 17)

The neoliberal shift to theoretical abstraction is also significant because it facilitates a discursive split between politics and economic theory, which is accorded the status of a science. Miskin argues that Treasury sought to conceal their political agenda by claiming that their advice was "value-free and politically neutral" (3). In light of this suggestion, Ann Mari May's description of the figuring of economics can be applied to the New Zealand experience:

Perhaps because of the adamant claims that economics is scientific and, hence, apolitical, economic theory is all the more effective in mystifying the political nature of its inquiry. (74)

Miskin identifies this notion of a split between the "political and economic spheres" as being drawn from the theories of the "Austrian [Hayek], Chicago [Friedman] and Virginian schools from which Treasury gained its ideas" (30). This separation of the political from the economic can be seen as an example of the division of "fields" into "self-policing, self-purifying communities" described by Said (155). This division also recalls Said's "cult of expertise" (136). According to Colin James, the promotion of economic theory which was "'value-free,' that is . . . excluding moral judgments" appealed to the "educated elite brought up on rational argument" (90). Certainly, the rarefied discourse about the structural adjustment programme excluded everyone other than this "educated elite" from the debate about the country's economic and political direction. As Dickson and Noble wrote of the economic elites in America, the neoliberal reformers "proclaimed a new age of reason while remystifying reality" (qtd. Said 156). Jesson states that the public were prevented from engaging with Rogernomics because it "was based on an incomprehensible body of economic theory that was almost impossible to debate." Echoing the

comments of Said in relation to both expertise and efficiency, Jesson says "the ends of policy are social, and are set by politicians, [while] the means are a technical matter to be settled by experts in terms of efficiency" ("The Libertarian Right" 42).

Both Miskin and Jesson highlight the significance of Treasury's rhetoric. They suggest that the complex jargon of economic theory served to alienate the community from the policy makers. It operated, as Said says of poststructuralism, as a "discourse of occultation and legitimation" (156). As has been noted, the proponents of monetarism attempted to represent their ideas for reform as both necessary and moderate. Treasury promoted its approach to policy as "common sense" through statements which are apparently self-evident truths:

While this (the government's role in the economy) is often expressed as a philosophical choice between free markets and planning, this is not a helpful distinction for practical purposes.
(*Economic Management* 111)

This sentence suggests that economic theory is much simpler and more straightforward than people realise, but it does so by seeking to efface the genuine philosophical problem at hand. The primacy of "efficiency" throughout Treasury's policy documents is also a prominent rhetorical feature. Miskin suggests that "efficiency" is regarded as *a priori* the measure of the usefulness of a particular policy decision, but there is no explanation of "why the state should elevate efficiency above other considerations" (40). Jesson describes a tactic whereby Treasury constructs an extreme point of view, such as the abolition of the state, in comparison with which its own position appears moderate ("Libertarian Right" 43). It is noteworthy that this tactic implies that the

"extreme" viewpoint deployed is "a stance that someone in New Zealand could realistically argue" (Miskin 40), and moreover that it is a legitimate perspective in the debate. In this way the spectrum across which political debates are conducted is reconfigured in a way that advantages the Treasury's position.

The section of *Economic Management* which is concerned with education policy showcases a number of the rhetorical techniques that characterise Treasury documents of the period. This section warrants particular attention as Davis has identified it as the part of the document he was "directly involved with writing." Davis has not made the extent of his involvement in the writing of this section clear, however he recalls the document as being "like an essay . . . a thought adventure" (Email to the author), which may suggest that he had a significant role in its development. This statement also indicates that Davis viewed the document as provisional and boldly experimental, qualities he valorises and seeks to emulate in his critical writing about New Zealand literature. Regardless of whether the words were penned by Davis or not, what is interesting here is the correspondence between the habits of language and rhetorical techniques of this document and the characteristics of poststructuralist discourse. I do not intend to suggest that Davis introduced this particular mode of discourse to Treasury documents. Rather, I am interested in the fact that this mode, which reflects certain poststructuralist tendencies, was employed to promote the neoliberal economic reforms with which he was involved.

A highly significant feature of the document is Treasury's tendency towards ambiguous language use. The consternation this ambiguity causes amongst economic commentators attests to the way in which the technique protects Treasury's policy documents from critique. Brian Easton discusses the use of the word "government" in Treasury's 1987 briefing, stating that it ranges in meaning "from the Executive Council, to the Cabinet and Caucus, to the policy

making bodies including advice agencies, to all the political and public agencies" (*Government Management: A Review of its Political Content* 35). Although the document suggests that government is conceived of as "the political executive in action," Easton observes that "it does not stick with such a definition" (36). Miskin argues that this practice of using words "in ways that are different from their generally accepted meanings" confuses the discussion (9; 40-41). Treasury's troubling linguistic behaviour is more readily explicable in terms of postmodernism than political or economic theory. Recalling Andrew Ross's description of the postmodern era as one in which "terms are by no means guaranteed their meanings," one can identify Treasury as a participant in the "politics of appropriation" (xi). This corroborates Ross's proposition that the democratising potential of these appropriative politics is limited, primarily benefiting those "closest to the center" (xi). Treasury, as the most influential of all government agencies, and thus at the very heart of political authority,²¹ is able to utilise the detachment of signifier from signified to advance its claims. In the process, it perpetuates the disempowerment of those for whom such ambiguity is unintelligible.

An example of Treasury's unconventional language-use that is particularly pertinent to the education policy section is the way in which the opposition between "private" and "public" is represented. Treasury uses the term "public" to refer to "the activities of the state" and the term "private" to describe "economic activities that are independent of state control" (Miskin 42 n.21). Miskin cites a definition of the "private sector" that she considers to be concordant with the Treasury's usage. This definition includes all economic activities that are

²¹ The extent of Treasury's power is documented in Jonathan Boston, "The Treasury and the organisation of Economic Advice: Some International Comparisons," in Brian Easton (ed), *The Making of Rogernomics*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1989. See also Miskin 29, on the influence of the department's briefing papers.

independent of state control, carried on principally for profit, but also including non-profit organisations directed at satisfying private needs, such as private hospitals and private schools. Included are enterprises owned by individuals or by groups . . . as well as the self-employed. (qtd. Miskin 42 n.21)²²

Miskin alludes to another way in which the opposition between "public" and "private" can be seen to operate, but she does not comment on its applicability to Treasury documents: this is the "philosophical split" between "public" as " 'out there,' impersonal, distant, formal" and "private" as " 'in here,' personal, intimate and closest to the self" (qtd. Miskin 42 n.21).²³ In light of the example that is to be examined here, I consider that both these definitions are instructive and relevant.

The discussion of education policy in *Economic Management* addresses the notions of "private good" and "public good" in relation to the state provision of education. Outlining the "Objectives and Role of Government in Education," the paper begins:

[t]he reasons for government involvement in providing or facilitating the provision of education are typically related to the nature of education as a public good (which benefits society as well as the individual who acquires it) or as a good with such merit that the government is prepared to support its acquisition. (267)

²² Jae K. Shim and Joel G Siegal, *Dictionary of Economics* New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1995: 278.

²³ Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, 'Justice: On Reading Private and Public,' *Political Theory* vol.9, no.3, August 1981: 328.

Moreover, government involvement in education "is often seen as a means of improving income distribution and reducing social inequality" (267). Despite the apparently traditionalist position of these statements, a fundamental change in the way education is regarded is latent here. The differentiation between state provision of education and the "facilitation" of provision by the government is a subtle but significant indication of Treasury's belief that direct government involvement in the sector should be reduced, and that the involvement of private providers should be encouraged.

Similarly, the distinction between a "public good" and "a good with such merit that the government is prepared to support its acquisition" is important, particularly in light of the implications of the term "public good". Initially though, attention must be drawn to the use of the word "good." The term "public good" is used in the sense of a desirable social outcome, but the "good" whose "acquisition" the government will "support" is clearly a product to be purchased (whether by the individual or the state). Furthermore, the description of this commodity as a "good with . . . merit" is significant. Traditionally education had been conceived of as a producer of "merit goods," which are benefits that cannot be measured in economic terms. The commercialisation of the New Zealand education system, of which *Economic Management* can be seen as a founding document, was predicated on the assumption that all benefits are economically measurable, thus rendering the concept of "merit goods" redundant (Easton *Commercialisation* 210; 213). However, due to the widespread acceptance of the "merit good" model, this conceptual shift had to be carefully managed, and the appropriation of the term "merit" in the context of a commercialising project can be seen as an allusion to and subversion of public perception. This is an example of Treasury's manipulation of semantic nuances to make its argument less stable, and thus harder to critique.

Although the definition of a "public good" given in the document is one "which benefits society as well as the individual who acquires it," it is the less favourable of the two conceptions of education in terms of Treasury's philosophy. This is because of the implicit coding of "public" as a negative term, aligned with the heavy-handed state, and a social collectivity which represses individuality (hence "impersonal, distant [and] formal"²⁴). By contrast, the other "good" is one for which government involvement is less extensive (to "support its acquisition" rather than to provide), and discretionary (the government "is prepared to support" the "acquisition" of certain kinds of education) rather than across the board. This notion of discretionary or targeted involvement is made clearer in the second and third sections, "Problems with present policy," and "Education and Labour Market Links," which suggest that education policy should be more responsive to the demands of the labour market and that education providers should operate in a competitive environment (267-68).

"Problems with present policy" describes the impact that "underlying problems which are often characteristic of state provision" of social services have on the education sector (267-8). The problems "concern the efficiency of education resource use," which is hindered by the lack of "price signals" that should "direct resources to areas of highest return to the community," by the lack of pressure on "education suppliers" to "satisfy consumers in order to obtain funding" (resulting in "weak incentives" to respond to "consumer monitoring"), and by the lack of "competitive incentives to minimise costs" (268). Here the terms in which success in the education sector was conventionally discussed (literacy and numeracy statistics, or the number of students obtaining School Certificate or University Entrance, for example) is replaced by a set of entirely abstract principles. This exemplifies the shift from

²⁴ Pitkin, 328, qtd. Miskin 42 n.21.

social outcomes to theoretical models described above. The sector is reduced to a series of economic processes, and thus education "suppliers" are expected to behave not as teachers, but as business-people in a competitive market-place. The *effectiveness* of the sector in terms of its social benefits is largely absent from the discussion. There are frequent allusions to the "poor performance" of the education sector (267; 268; 270), but this is measured in terms of "efficiency" rather than efficacy. The only reference to "effectiveness" comes in an acknowledgment that because "it is apparent that successful education participation is more likely for middle- and upper-income groups" the "distribution of successful educational outcomes is inequitable" (268). Rather than advocating the institution of programmes to address this discrepancy, the Treasury asserts that "[t]his calls into question the effectiveness of education as a vehicle for equalising social outcomes" (268), thereby undermining a key social rationale for the government's investment in education.

The section "Education and the Labour Market" suggests that the sector's "poor performance" has a negative impact on "the adjustment of the labour market directly, and indirectly, on the performance of the overall economy" (268). The "need to acquire labour market skills" gives individuals "clear incentives to invest in education," but the "responses of the education sector are overly lagged in adapting to changes in underlying demand," and thus labour market adjustment is "impeded" (268). Additionally, the "supply" of education may "distort supply and demand conditions in particular segments of the labour market by giving rise to barriers to entry (particularly to the major professions) which artificially restrict participation in various activities" (268). These comments appear to identify problems for which there are no obvious solutions. The education sector's response to "underlying demand" in the labour market will always be "lagged" if the demand is for people with specific training, as such training delays entry into the work force. The concern over

"barriers to entry" to some professions evidences Treasury's belief that market processes are self-regulating, and thus the principles of supply and demand are a more appropriate means of tailoring workers to the needs of the labour market than "artificial" restrictions. These two issues seem to conflict — in order to solve the former, one would need detailed planning in order to ensure the labour market's needs were met, but the latter argues against just this sort of intervention. The concluding sentence of this section muddies the waters further, as it declares "[t]he linkage between education services and social well-being through the labour market in particular is a strong reason why policy review and change in this area is important" (268). This statement is made with no reference to what constitutes "social well-being," no explanation of how it can be attained by addressing the issues raised, nor any indication how those issues should be resolved. This is an example of the kind of "circular" arguments and "confusing . . . phraseology and sentence structure" Miskin identifies scattered throughout the Treasury's briefing papers (41).

The section on "Tertiary Education Issues" demonstrates the most profound application of neoliberal theory in the review of education. This section is also significant due to the comprehensive restructuring of the tertiary sector in the early 1990s, much of which was directly based on the recommendations it contains and those of the 1987 briefing *Government Management*. It is stated that "[s]trong social policy reasons cannot readily be established for the direct government supply of tertiary services largely free at the point of consumption." Tertiary education is characterised as "more a private than a public good," and decisions to participate in tertiary education are "discretionary investment or consumption decisions" (268). The "private good" character of tertiary education is positively coded in Treasury's schema, as it is associated with the individual's "capture" of benefits from their education, particularly "higher lifetime earnings or increased utility" (268). This

manoeuvre again converts education into a commodity to be purchased, and once again demonstrates the New Right belief in the market's capacity to replace state provision of social services. The discussion acknowledges that as not everyone would have the resources available to purchase their tertiary education asset, the government "may wish to offset ability-to-pay constraints" by replacing the universal entitlement to essentially free tertiary study with a "more selective, targeted approach [which] would meet this objective with least wastage" (269).

The tertiary sector also suffers from the problems of "insulation of suppliers from consumers, low incentives to minimise costs, and sluggish ability to change resource distribution for optimal return" that plague the rest of the system. Also, as has been noted in relation to the labour market, "quota methods" for "rationing course demand" are "inefficient." Predictably, the solution to these problems is the "greater use of market processes," with an "important" but diminished role for state subsidies remaining.²⁵ Differentiated fees are advocated as a means of "improving the *pricing* of tertiary services," so that student fees reflect "the different costs of courses" (original emphasis 269). The analysis concludes by suggesting that by reducing the "dominance of government provision" of tertiary education, and through the relaxation of "restrictive" regulations, "private suppliers" could be "encouraged to participate," leading to greater responsiveness to consumer demands due to competition in the sector (269). Once again the coding of these terms is significant, as the "dominance" of the government suggests heavy-handedness, regulations "restrict," and the sector's best hope for improved efficiency is the involvement of "private" (independent) providers.

Economic Management's discussion of education policy strategically annexes the

²⁵ A reduction of public spending in this area is explicitly recommended.

domain of another government department (the Ministry of Education) through market rhetoric. To appropriate Said's terms, this annexation is effected through the document's operation as a "discourse of occultation," as it makes the language of education policy unfamiliar and mysterious, and as a discourse of "legitimation," as the status of economics as a "science" confounds critique of its ideological nature. It should be noted that the occultatory quality of the discourse is not a function of the kind of polysyllabic obfuscation Said complains of in literary theory. Indeed *Economic Management* attempts to explain things in clear and simple language, reflecting the "common-sense" position it wishes to assume. Rather, what it does is to subtly re-code everyday language with new economic valencies. Through this employment of the "politics of appropriation," and through its straightforward appeal to good sense, it conceals the radical nature of the theoretical shift it represents.²⁶ The document also mystifies through its application of an economic model foreign to the discussion of education policy.

Economic Management argues that a change in how education is conceived of is necessary in order to improve sectoral "efficiency," and this change is from the "merit good" model to one which regards education as principally a tool of economic growth. The discussion suggests that problems in the education system could be reduced by the adoption of a market model, and its use of phrases typically used in analyses of the market, such as "price signals" and "supply and demand," serves to characterise the sector as a market-place. Moreover, by referring to the "acquisition" of education, by describing students

²⁶ An example of this can be found in the discussion of the primary and secondary sectors. Treasury appeals to public awareness about how the education system is failing those who are socio-economically disadvantaged, and advocates "flexibility" (another *a priori* good in neoliberal jargon) as a solution to this problem. The model proposed implies that government regulation is too blunt an instrument to redress educational inequality, and that schools would benefit from the ability to compete for resources and staff on the basis of need. This ignores the fact that low-decile schools already suffer through their inability to attract highly skilled teachers, and that competition could in fact exacerbate this difficulty. Treasury's position is argued as if it is an obvious and common sense solution to a major social problem, thereby disguising its ideological commitment to a competitive market model.

as "consumers" and teachers, schools and universities as "providers" and "resources," and by describing participation in tertiary education as a "discretionary investment or consumption" decision, the document normalises the conception of education as a commodity. In this way *Economic Management's* application of market rhetoric facilitates a fundamental shift in the discourse of education policy.

There is an irony in the circumstances of the production of *Economic Management's* discussion of education policy. It has been noted that Davis was employed by Treasury under a scheme which privileged analytical skills over training in economics, a fact which would appear to conflict with the department's pronouncements about the necessity of tailoring education to the demands of the labour market. Davis gained what we might call (after Said) his "economic accreditation" during his employment at the Treasury, as he completed an MBA, but the qualification which gained him the position — his Master's thesis on Allen Curnow — was not geared to any conceivable labour market demand. Davis's education was a general, liberal one, and clearly Treasury appreciated the broad range of skills that such training develops. Despite this, the policy they advocate suggests that educational choices should reflect (and in fact anticipate) the skills required by the labour market (EM 268). Such an attitude towards education conforms with the "cult of expertise" Said identifies, as it prioritises the acquisition of a narrowly focused, specialised field of knowledge.

Having returned to Said, it is necessary to address the notion of "interference" in specific relation to Davis. As Said notes, the social utility of literary theory is inhibited by the ethos of "noninterference" within the academy, as literary critics deal with "*literary* texts" while economists and political experts have authority in matters of government policy (146). These disciplinary boundaries

prevent discourse between fields which, Said implies, could have positive social and political outcomes. How, then, does one read Davis's position? Davis transgresses the boundary between the literary and political spheres, and, as one can see, some of the habits of poststructuralist discourse are replicated in the policy document he contributed to. His education qualifies him as an "expert" in the practice of literary criticism, but he also becomes an "insider" in the hub of the national economy. This certainly constitutes a form of "interference," but it is apparent that it is not quite the kind of interference Said had in mind. There are, it seems, two kinds of interference being practised here, and the difference between them is important.

What Said wants literary critics to do is to use their skills of discourse analysis and the tools of contemporary theory to open up the world of practical politics — to do radical work as a literary critic. His ideal of "interference" is one which provides new and useful ways of reading texts of social significance, revealing how they operate, and how they construct their own authority. The way in which *Economic Management* appropriates the technology of poststructuralism does exactly the opposite of this. Rather than opening the text up and exposing the power that inheres in its language, Davis's project in Treasury uses the awareness of that power to annex the discourse and conceal its ideological foundation. The Treasury documents operate as a "discourse of occultation and legitimation" and, in this way, they reinforce a particular structure of social power.

(iv) And: Bourgeois revolution

The *And* project provides a site for considering Davis's work in relation to the discourse about the politics of postmodernism discussed above. The

oppositional stance of the magazine, the way in which Davis's own essays draw on historical styles and images, and the enthusiasm amongst the *And* community for complexity are crucial aspects of the project. Chapter two considers the extent to which these can be read as manifestations of the trends described by Jameson, Said and Ross.

A matter which requires particular attention at the conclusion of this chapter however, is the contrast between the revolutionary literary politics of Davis's critical and poetic work and his professional complicity with bourgeois interests in the field of practical politics. In relation to this question, it is important to note the lack of contestation regarding practical politics evident in *And*.²⁷ The opposition to bourgeois culture expressed in *And* is not matched by contestation of the political power of the middle classes. As John Newton has noted, Davis's criticism displays a "fondness for Left-sounding jargon" (using such terms as "work," "revolution," "praxis," and "bourgeois"), but his application of these terms is depoliticised (183). Indeed, Davis's revolutionary leftist rhetoric appears to contradict the ideological position evidenced by the celebration of the market expressed in interviews and in his critical writing, and which is inherent in his professional work. An explanation for this inconsistency can be drawn, appropriately, from one of Davis's most frequently deployed sources — Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*.

Barthes's discussion of bourgeois ideology proposes a division between the "ethically and the politically bourgeois" (139), and such a distinction is crucial to an understanding of Davis's projects — both literary and economic. It also is a distinction which is relevant to an understanding of the policies of the Labour Party in the 1980s, as the moral motivation of party activists excluded

²⁷ It should be noted that my commentary here does not hold true for all contributors to the magazine. The essays by Roger Horrocks in *And*/2 and *And*/4 are some notable exceptions.

consideration of economic theory. Assuming the two realms to be autonomous, the party contested bourgeois ethics while promoting economic policy which benefited the bourgeoisie. Barthes's division between the "ethically and the politically bourgeois" is manifest in a number of ways, but his analysis of the position of the avant-garde is especially pertinent to a consideration of Davis. As will be shown in the following chapter, Davis clearly situates himself as an avant-gardist, as his writing in *And* (about both Allen Curnow and Ian Wedde) exhibits the impulses which characterise such programmes of cultural reform. Davis deliberately draws attention to the vanguardist ambitions of his project as his language recalls the militant proclamations of the modernist avant-garde. Through association with such anti-bourgeois movements as Futurism, and through the denotation of "bourgeois" as a dirty word in his criticism (it is "cultural naivety" ["Solo Curnow" 60]), Davis indicates that bourgeois culture is the target of his revolutionary project.

Barthes considers that "there are revolts against bourgeois ideology" and that these are the "avant-garde." However he sees avant-gardism as "socially limited" because the "minority group of artists and intellectuals" who comprise the avant-garde are in fact members of the bourgeoisie, "without public other than the class which they contest, and who remain dependent on its money in order to express themselves" (139). Furthermore, because of the "strongly made distinction" between issues of "art and morals" and issues of politics, the avant-garde focuses solely on contesting the aesthetics of the bourgeoisie, "remain[ing] for the most part indifferent, or even attached, to its political determinations" (139 n.17.).

This proposition compellingly explains the apparent contradiction between Davis's cultural and political agendas. Davis's education locates him as a

member of a materially privileged class,— like Barthes's avant-gardists, he contests the bourgeoisie from within, appealing to a similarly educated public — although in the introduction to his Master's thesis he suggests that his "instinct for what is imposing rather than accurate" (the daring *essayist*, in that word's originary sense) is the legacy of his "mov[e] from the literary nouveau riche to the cultured" (i).²⁸ This statement demonstrates Davis's celebration of the marginalised in matters of aesthetics: he suggests that being "cultured" (in the aesthetic centre) diminishes one's ability to engage with literature in a controversial way. Such an understanding of the constraints of a centrist position clearly informs the *And* project's profession of radical marginality. His employment of politically charged, "Left-sounding" rhetoric characterises his project as a revolution, but this revolution is not social or political, but "exclusively aesthetic" (Newton 183). The depoliticised use of such terminology is analogous to the depoliticised appropriation of images of revolution which Jameson describes ("Regarding Postmodernism" 18-19). In Davis's criticism this language operates symbolically to convey the oppositional nature of his aesthetic project, but it is emptied of the ideological content which relates it to *practical* politics. Jameson's contention that such "cannibalization" works to "contain" political consciousness can also be applied to this feature of Davis's work, as the use of language associated with left-wing revolution serves to conceal the lack of engagement with issues of practical politics.

That Davis's project conforms to Barthes's notion of a "socially limited" avant-garde is apparent when one re-introduces his professional position. Barthes's explanation of the lack of "political contestation" among the avant-garde is that

[w]hat the avant-garde does not tolerate about the bourgeoisie is

²⁸ As both the introduction and conclusion of Davis's thesis are unpagged I refer to them by roman numerals. The introduction comprises pages i-viii, the conclusion pages ix-xv.

its language, not its status. This does not necessarily mean that it approves of this status; simply, it leaves it aside. (139)

In the case of Davis however, there is evidence that he does not "simply" leave aside the issue of bourgeois authority, but that he is in fact "attached" to it. Davis, who is rebelling against the "bourgeois epistemology" of figures such as Curnow, is, at the same time, a bureaucrat — a decidedly bourgeois occupation. More specifically, he is a bureaucrat working for the advancement of the capitalist economy, which is, by definition, bolstering the economic and political power of the bourgeoisie.

It is apparent that Davis does not consider that his position compromises the anti-bourgeois pose of his criticism, as he draws attention to it at the end of "Roger's Thesaurus," signing off "Leigh Davis / TREASURY" (60). That Davis can appeal to his professional authority in this way while attacking bourgeois culture can be attributed, as Newton suggests, to the fact that

Davis's conception of himself as an outsider, an insurgent, the flag-bearer of an outlaw discourse, depends on precisely this [Barthes's] distinction between an aesthetic and a political centre. (183)

Davis is able to signal his involvement with political authority without embarrassment because this does not interfere with his oppositional cultural project. The division of the political and the aesthetic means that

Davis can advertise Treasury as his element and yet continue to valorise himself as an outlaw because power has been reduced to *literary* power and history to *literary* history. (Newton 183)

This focus on the aesthetic, and more specifically the literary, recalls the strict specialisation of Said's "noninterference." Davis's role as a critic of bourgeois culture is not invalidated by his complicity with bourgeois power, because these spheres — the aesthetic and the political — are regarded as discrete and unrelated.

Chapter Two

And: this is "civil(ised) war"

(i) "Set Up" and Manifesto art

Davis's editorial in *And/1*, entitled "Set Up," provides an outline of the magazine's project at its inception, and highlights Davis's perennial concern with historical awareness. Insofar as it is the enunciation of a project of radical reform (at least in aesthetic terms), it can be read as a kind of *And* manifesto. Davis himself endorses such a reading, as he suggests that "little magazines" often approach "loose manifesto positions, position papers" (2). In order to understand Davis's employment of the manifesto form it is useful to consider the development of manifesto art, particularly that of the Futurist movement. There are a number of other manifestos that also illuminate aspects of Davis's work in *And*, including various manifestos of the modernist avant-garde (notably the Vorticist manifestos in *Blast* and the Imagist manifesto), Charles Olson's 1950 essay "Projective Verse," and those found in New Zealand precursors to *And*. However, the Futurist manifestos are of specific relevance due to the resonances between Davis's polemic and that of Futurist ideologue and prolific manifesto writer F.T. Marinetti, the function of the manifestos of each in relation to their cultural project, and the intrinsic similarities between these two projects. (The influence of Futurism is also significant in *Willy's Gazette*, and thus certain aspects of the Futurist movement will be expanded on in chapter three.)

Marjorie Perloff gives an account of the style and form of the manifestos produced by the Futurist movement. She suggests that in a period of feverish manifesto production across Europe in the years preceding World War One, the Futurist manifestos were instrumental in the conversion of the form from political pamphlet to art form (Perloff 81). By 1848 (when Marx and Engels produced the *Communist Manifesto*), the form had already undergone a radical transformation, from a public document issued by or on behalf of the state to an

"agonistic mode of discourse" (82). The rhetorical style of the *Communist Manifesto* is clearly the antecedent of that which distinguishes later manifesto art, as Perloff suggests that it "paved the way for the grafting of the poetic onto the political discourse that we find in Futurist, and later in Dada and Surrealist, manifesto" (82).

Perloff identifies a significant divergence from earlier manifestos in the Futurists' "brash refusal to remain in the expository or critical corner" and their recognition of the power of a "sufficiently aestheticised" pronouncement about art to "all but take the place of the promised art work" (85). Such a statement is justified when one considers the rhetorical force of Marinetti's manifestos, and compares them to the somewhat uneven application of the stated artistic project in other Futurist literature. This observation also serves to illustrate one of the parallels between Davis's and Marinetti's manifesto style, as Davis suggests in "Set Up" that the creation of a little magazine is an activity which is "as potentially ubiquitous and interesting as making artworks themselves" (1). Moreover, as Hugh Lauder has noted, Davis's writing in both *And* and *Willy's Gazette* exhibits a tendency to blur the division between criticism and poetry (theory and practice) (Lauder "Interview — Debate with Leigh Davis" 317).

The modernist adoption of manifesto art for the purpose of promoting avant-gardism is, I would suggest, perpetuated by Davis, but it is further transformed in a number of ways. In the context of "Set Up," and Davis's critical writing in *And* more generally, there are (broadly speaking) two attributes of Futurism I wish to consider. The first of these is the way in which avant-gardism is figured, and the second is the celebration of speed.

The avant-garde's oedipal hostility towards dominant art practices is expressed by the Futurists in the language of war. The manifesto form was the principal

tool for the dissemination of their radical cultural programme. Marinetti established the parameters for the composition of manifestos, demanding that his fellow Futurists produce similarly aggressive pronouncements, and that they adhere to his aesthetic principles. The primary requirement of the *forma di Manifesto* as conceived by Marinetti was that it displayed "*de la violence et de la précision*."¹ The "violence" he demands relates not only to the energetic and forceful promotion of Futurist ideals, but also to the advocacy of militancy as the means to effect revolution. The "precision" refers to the brevity, clarity and candour of the text. In Futurist manifestos the movement's exaltation of war and violence in literal terms is reflected in the rhetoric used to promote literary and artistic change. In Marinetti's "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" he describes the document as "this violently upsetting, incendiary manifesto," and proclaims that the Futurists must "set fire to the library shelves! Turn aside the canals to flood the museums!" and implores them to "take up [their] pickaxes, [their] axes and hammers, and wreck, wreck the venerable cities pitilessly!" (42-43). Such bellicose statements are a persistent characteristic of the Futurist documents.

When considering the style of the Futurist Manifestos, it is highly significant that Marinetti considered theatre to be an effective art form for inspiring revolution (Marinetti "The Futurist Synthetic Theatre" 123-29). Perloff, who describes Marinetti as an "incomparable" conceptual artist, notes that the manifestos, as well as his performances (which frequently involved the declamation of the manifestos) were intended to "transform politics into a kind of lyric theatre" (84). The language of the manifestos is highly theatrical, and they conform generally to the guidelines expressed in "The Futurist Synthetic Theatre" (1915). The *sintesi* (synthetic plays) proposed in this manifesto are brief, "synthesizing fact and idea in the smallest number of words" (124), correlating with the idea of

¹ Marinetti, in a letter to Henry Maassen, cited in Perloff 81.

"precision" in manifesto writing. Davis's writing does not conform particularly to the ideal of brevity, but other elements of Marinetti's "precision" are evident, such as the bold and forthright style. "The Futurist Synthetic Theatre" privileges theatre which is improvised and dynamic, and this relates to the notion of the writing of Futurist manifestos as provisional, a risky business (126-27).²

While Davis certainly does not display any idealisation of war, he does employ a combative style as he situates *And* as an "oppositional" project. This oppositionality is signalled through the magazine's aesthetic, as well as its bombastic rhetoric. The production of *And* magazine was heavily influenced by punk style. The editors of *And* set out to bring "marketing style" to the little magazine, and the style they chose was the raw, immediate and shocking mode of punk rock (Davis Interview with the author 173). The basic, low-budget production of *And* did not only reflect practical considerations, but also a desire to demarcate the magazine as determinedly marginal. The style of *And* suggested impermanence, "delinquency" (Williams "On the Margins? New Zealand Little Magazines from *Freed* to *And*" 83), and fashion-consciousness, and thus it proclaimed its opposition to more extravagantly produced journals, such as *Landfall*. *And*'s appropriation of the punk ethos was a calculated marketing manoeuvre, and this commercialisation of resistance exemplifies the trend described by Jameson ("Postmodernism" 124).

The cover of *And*/1, designed by Davis, represents the magazine's aggressively oppositional stance in a typically ironic way. The still from "The Man From God's Country" (MGM, 1954) shows two gun-toting cowboys (Davis and Calder perhaps). The pair have just burst through a door, and the room they have entered is clearly a hostile environment, one where they expect to find

² See also Perloff 102.

enemies. The title of the film is significant, as New Zealand's frequent characterisation as "God's Own Country" makes the analogy between image and project clearer. *And* is bravely going where no little magazine has gone before. Even though *And*'s founders are bound to be out-numbered they are boldly staging an ambush, taking on the villains of New Zealand literature. The image is an adversarial, heroic one, and the cover copy, "READY — coming in" reinforces the idea that the magazine is making a surprise attack on the literary scene. It is also, of course, a corny image. Davis appropriates a symbol of heroism from a historical genre rich in implications (the Western), but he ironises it. The image is appealed to with a metaphorical cocked eyebrow — Davis and Calder make a joke at their own expense about their desire to be literary heroes.³

True to the style of a literary guerilla, Davis explains that *And* will "contribute to various NZ literatures mild forms of sabotage and re-examination," and describes the process as "salvo, counter salvo, the sport of kings" (1). The *And* impulse is, he states, a "secessionist" one (1). His portentous conclusion to "Set Up" states "And so we bring disaster to the tired New Zealand literature that we know, releasing an endless stream of invective and battles" (7). This rhetoric is also evident in *And*/4, where Davis describes language writing as "civil war" ("Public Policy" 84). These pronouncements are made by Davis in a tongue-in-cheek fashion, but he shares with Marinetti and the Futurists' English counterparts — the Vorticists — an appreciation for the theatricality of martial language. The wit of the *And*/1 cover, and the humorous use of militant rhetoric also pokes fun at the impulses behind little magazines as a type. The desire to make a guerrilla raid on conventional literature or literary discourse often provides the impetus for the founding of an avant-garde magazine such as *And*. Davis draws attention to this feature by parodying it, making it difficult

³ This manoeuvre is replicated in *Willy's Gazette*, see my 125.

to decipher to what extent *And*'s "secessionist impulse" is serious.

Davis's deployment of the style of the Futurist manifestos can be seen as an example of the "cannibalization" of historical styles referred to by Jameson. As has been discussed, Jameson argues that such cannibalisation reflects a desire for "historicity" in a (postmodern) culture "incapable of dealing with time and history" ("Regarding Postmodernism" 19). These historical images are simulacra which become detached from their context; in particular, their relation to their political context (and hence their political *significance*) is lost.⁴ Davis's appropriation of the Futurist style operates in the way Jameson describes — it does detach the manifesto form from the political context which was crucial to its development. The manifesto's origins are, as Perloff notes, political, and the manifestos of the modernist vanguard reflect their association with the rise of Fascism in Europe. The militant rhetoric in particular evidences the climate of aggressive nationalism which characterised the pre-war years. The militancy of *And* is, by contrast, depoliticised.

While both Davis's project and his manner of promoting it draws on the manifestos of the Futurists and *Blast*, their flamboyant style becomes near-burlesque when transposed to the skeptical postmodern politics of *And*. Frank O'Hara's "Personism: A Manifesto" (1959) demonstrates the ripeness of the manifesto form for satirical treatment, as he promotes his newly founded (fictitious) movement. O'Hara undermines the authority of manifestos of the avant-garde, which often proclaim their objectives in a portentous manner, and promote their particular art-project as profoundly transformative. O'Hara makes ridiculous the apocalyptic prophecies of manifestos such as those of the Futurists and the Vorticists: "In all modesty, I confess that it may be the death of literature as we know it. Poetry being quicker and surer than prose, it is only

⁴ See also Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" 117.

just that poetry finish literature off" (xiv). O'Hara's parodic piece suggests that the writers of earnest examples of manifestos take themselves and their projects far too seriously. His "manifesto" draws to a close asking, "[w]hat can we expect of Personism? (This is getting good, isn't it?) Everything, but we won't get it" (xvi), conveying his opinion that movements promoted in manifestos typically fail to deliver. He implies that to promote one's own ideas about art as a theoretical breakthrough or revolution is a self-aggrandising gesture, and one which fails to recognise the true scale of the influence of those ideas. O'Hara's understanding of manifesto art is, to borrow a phrase from Perloff, "disillusioned or cool" (Perloff 195). The manifesto element of Davis's project in *And* is not satirical in the style of O'Hara, but it does display a desire to exploit a similar caricature of the form. Davis's use of the manifesto form, and his adoption at times of the rhetoric of Marinetti and the *Blast* manifestos, is pointedly carried out without *gravitas*, and is always self-aware.

The emphasis on historical contingency, ephemerality and boldness found in the Futurist manifestos is evident throughout Davis's work, particularly in the *And*/1 editorial. For the Futurists, as well as Davis, these notions are tied to a celebration of speed and speed-enhancing technologies. Davis states in the opening paragraph of "Set Up" that "timing is important - when to open and when to stop," indicating that the short life-span the magazine is designed to have is a tactical move (1). The historical awareness Davis insists upon requires an acceptance of *And*'s own historical contingency, and he makes clear in "Set Up" that the ephemeral nature of the project is designed to fulfil this condition. One of the distinctions Davis makes between the *And* project and other work in the field of New Zealand literature is that *And* recognises its temporariness. He states that little magazines should exist "as an institution or a product only to a minimal degree," and that thus they should be viewed as part of a process or discussion rather than a "fixity that is already losing its importance" (1).

This rejection of the notion of timeless or ahistorical writing about art resonates with Marinetti's first Futurist manifesto, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" (1909):

When we are forty, other younger and stronger men will probably throw us in the wastebasket like useless manuscripts — we want it to happen!

They will come against us, our successors . . . flexing the hooked claws of predators, sniffing doglike at the academy doors the strong odour of our decaying minds, which already will have been promised to the literary catacombs. (43)

While Marinetti's rhetoric is rather lurid, the sentiment expressed here is much the same as that expressed by Davis. Davis states that the impulses behind the first issue of the magazine would, if the magazine was sufficiently "historically aware," appear somewhat dated two years into the project. By 1985, when *And's* fourth and final issue appeared, it appears Davis felt this level of historical awareness had been maintained, as he describes in "Public Policy" the way in which the "normative" audience of the magazine had developed a historical appreciation of post-structuralism (83).

The "timefulness" of *And* is in part constituted by its "soft" copy ("Set Up" 1). Davis emphasises the provisional nature of the material in the magazine, describing the essays as "openers" and "freehand maps" produced in an "ad hoc" fashion (1; 7). This provisionality (which is characterised as a virtue in itself) is the result of the purported haste with which the magazine is assembled, which in turn guarantees that the material is as close as possible to the "readers' or writers' present" (1). The importance Davis attributes to this is manifest in

his interview with *Parallax* editor Alan Loney, which also appears in *And*/1. Davis raises the issue of speed and immediacy in relation to Loney's editorial practice:

What do you feel about the publication lags in *Parallax*? It's about a year to 14 months before things get into *Parallax*. Does that concern you at all? I mean in the Heraclitean sense of being always half a second behind the action and now . . . we're 14 months behind. Is that a rigidity which bothers you? (54)

Loney describes the "publication lags" as the result of "an embarrassment of riches" — too much material — and he does not want to "speed the magazine up" as Davis suggests (55), revealing one significant divergence between the *Parallax* and *And* projects. This is attributable in part to Loney's commitment to a more extravagant style of production. Mark Williams has described Loney as a "meticulous craftsman" whose magazine was "handsomely done on good quality paper with proper binding," while the *And* editors "emulated the producers of comics and punk handbills" ("*And* and the 'Understanders'" 209). Williams also notes that in comparison with *And*'s dandyish pose and humour *Parallax* presented its material with "high seriousness" (207). The combination of the desire for lavish production and for serious, measured copy means that for Loney, speed is not a priority. For Davis immediacy and speed of production are virtues, and the magazine enthusiastically foregrounds this through its low-budget aesthetic and claims of provisionality.

And's preoccupation with immediacy, rapidity and the provisionality and dynamism of the text also relates to Marinetti. He wrote in "The Birth of a Futurist Aesthetic" (1915), "[t]o a finished house we prefer the framework of a house in construction whose girders are the colour of danger" (81), capturing

the Futurists' taste for work which is only partially complete and their conviction that such work is both hazardous and exhilarating. The Futurist interest in the concepts of speed and dynamism, developed from Marinetti's reading of Henri Bergson (Berghaus 25), forms an integral part of their belief in producing work which is in a sense both instantaneous and immediately historical, and this preoccupation is also evident in Davis's *And* contributions.

The valorisation of speed in the production of the magazine is comparable with the primacy of "efficiency" in Treasury's discourse and the rapid reform project advocated by Roger Douglas. *And*'s restructuring of literary discourse conforms to the principles for policy reform described in *Unfinished Business*. The notion of moving in "quantum leaps" rather than "one step at a time" is manifest in the comprehensiveness of *And*'s adoption of theory. The magazine does not introduce theory gradually to its readers, instead it plunges them into a highly theorised discussion of literature. Douglas's belief that "speed" is necessary to effect reform, and that it is "almost impossible to go too fast" corresponds with *And*'s aim of eliminating "publication lags." This aspect of the *And* impulse also reflects Douglas's emphasis on the role of "momentum." Given Davis's predilection for applying the jargon of military strategy to literary criticism, it is conceivable that he, like Douglas, appreciated the way in which "speed" and "momentum" in a reform programme gives a tactical advantage: "the fire of opponents is much less accurate if they have to shoot at a moving target" (Douglas 220-25).

It should be noted that although Davis makes bold statements about the "soft" and timely copy, two of his own articles do not conform to this ideal. "Roger's Thesaurus" opens: "[a]fter almost a year since writing the following essay, I have been recently thinking closely again of Roger Horrocks' poem — re-reading the essay for publication" (49). While arguably this signals that Davis

has re-worked the material, a year's delay in the publication of the essay is surely a "lag," and the revision process is hardly consistent with the model of "ad hoc" work and "freehand maps." "Solo Curnow," which appeared in *And/3* (1984), is dated 1982 (although it was probably reworked for its presentation as a Stout Research Centre paper shortly before publication). While it focuses on a 1982 collection of Curnow's poetry, the essay relies heavily on Davis's Master's thesis (written in 1979), and in fact large chunks of it have been taken directly from this earlier work. Once again the process of revision over a substantial period of time is closer to the measured practice of institutionally sanctioned critics than the hasty assemblage of ideas still in formation that the magazine advertises.

Davis's interest in history conditions both the form of *And* magazine and the content of his own contributions. He suggests that the little magazine "aspires to the condition of a weekly," indicating that *And*, like *Willy's Gazette*, is designed to be momentarily newsy, quickly receding into the category of a historical artifact, complete with its "date preserved" ("Set Up" 1). The contributions in a little magazine resist "endstop[ing]," because of both the provisional and "soft" nature of the content, and the historical context provided by the other material in the magazine (1). Davis cites William Carlos Williams's description of the "precarious business" of little magazines, which celebrates the "rebellious" impulse of those who create them:

The little magazines never more than barely keep going, their five and ten contributions from some semi-submerged group of five or six young men and women — who mostly want to publish their own rebellious work — serving, though the hopes are big, to get only a few issues out before they collapse. (qtd. 2)⁵

⁵ These quotes are drawn from William Carlos Williams's *Autobiography*.

This passage illuminates the *And* project in a number of ways. Williams suggests the makers of little magazines share the virtues of diligence and dedication to their cause, and are in Davis's terms both "factional" and "oppositional" (1; 2). For Williams, a defining feature of these projects is the inevitability of their demise after a small number of issues. This is significant because *And* — by implication unlike the little magazines Williams describes — is designed to display self-awareness about its generic features. It recognises and embraces the fact that it is destined to be short-lived, and sets its own limits from the outset. With no ambitions of longevity, *And* makes its brief incursion with its exit already planned.

The planned ephemerality of *And* demonstrates Davis's appreciation of another aspect of Williams's discussion, as he advances the idea that little magazines make up the constantly regenerating front of a "continuous" avant-garde project:

It is only in the aggregate that they maintain a steady trickle of excellence . . .

To me it is one magazine, not several. It is a continuous magazine, the only one I know with an absolute freedom of editorial policy and a succession of proprietorships that follows the democratic rule. (qtd. 2)

This notion of the "continuous magazine" appeals to Davis as a further way to situate *And* historically. Davis declares that little magazines "arise in the middle of conversations already started" (2), acknowledging *And*'s position as one instance of an ongoing endeavour. The notion of the continuous little magazine demonstrates an understanding of the form as a tool of, or even a metonymy

for, the literary avant-garde. For *And*, its part in the "continuous magazine" not only refers generally to the magazines of the avant-garde, but also specifically to its own genealogy, as the newest in a tradition dating back to the *Phoenix* generation. *And* is located as "continuous" (in Williams's sense) with *Phoenix*, *Freed* and *Parallax*, but Davis also implies that it is differentiated by its consciousness of this location. Clearly there is an irony here, as Davis argues that *And* is an instance of the "continuous" magazine, but at the same time it is a point of rupture as it is finite, transient and located in a clearly demarcated historical context. This equivocal position is comparable with that assumed by his poetry, as Mark Williams has suggested:

By pitting himself against his strong local precursors, particularly Curnow, Davis has situated himself as both subvertor and inheritor of the line of 'mainstream' figures stretching from Curnow through Stead and Wedde. ("Introduction" 29).

Davis highlights the generic features of little magazines, making explicit his intention for *And* to conform to the principles expressed by William Carlos Williams. Taking the point of difference for *And* as its interrogation of its situation, other literary magazines come in for scrutiny in these terms, specifically *Landfall* and *Islands*. While these are "institutions," by contrast with the little magazines, Davis criticises them for their lack of awareness of their institutional or historical position:

Landfall or *Islands* became inoperative or boxed before confronting (horizontally) the culture or the conventions they were part of. Their power to recognise the conditions of their own information seems non-existent. (4)

Davis criticises *Landfall* particularly for its failure to address the "horizontal questions" posed by its content.⁶ He suggests that these magazines ignore the "political and destabilising" effects that the inter-relation of works within a single issue generate.

Davis's conception of the *And* project exhibits a number of the traits which Jameson, Said and Ross identify as central to the relationship between postmodernism and late or consumer capitalism. His desire for the magazine to foreground its impermanence and the brevity of its moment of currency links (somewhat ironically) with Jameson's "disappearance of a sense of history" ("Postmodernism" 125). Jameson's argument is that the "media saturation of news" causes events to become historical more rapidly, and as a result our "capacity to retain [our] own past" is diminishing (125). In a culture characterised by increasing rapidity of change and the "planned obsolescence" of consumerism, time becomes "fragment[ed] . . . into a series of perpetual presents" which we are increasingly unable to make sense of (124-25). The character of *And* reflects these cultural phenomena, as it professes and celebrates the anticipation of its own obsolescence. Davis imagines the project to be an "in-house newsletter" ("Set Up" 1) and emphasises that the magazine is assembled quickly so that it might be current, displaying an enthusiasm for the rapidity of the news media, where newscasts and papers are put together under the pressure of deadlines. For Davis, what's new(s) today is history tomorrow. Davis and Jameson's opposing interpretations of how the acceleration of culture is related to history suggest that when Davis talks about "history," he's not referring to something Jameson would recognise *as* history.

As a "newsletter," *And* is designed for "anyone who recognises the general

⁶ Davis's use of the term "horizontal" in this context is informed by his reading of Bruce Andrews's essay "Text and Context," from *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*. For a discussion of the opposition between "horizontal" and "vertical" conceptions of literature see my 80.

logo" (1), indicating that the magazine's information is not accessible to everyone. The "logo" in question is, broadly speaking, poststructuralism, a discourse which both Ross and Said note has the potential to function as an exclusionary force. The complexity of the material in *And* reflects the editors' desire to showcase the exciting and difficult theory with which they were engaged. Alex Calder describes the "stance" of *And* in his memoir of the project:

We had a liking for manifestos and dandyish poses, we liked irony and we liked difficulty. A common term of approbation in those days was that such and such 'had a mona lisa smile.' *And* could best work, not by explaining things patiently, but by pitching it up, by intriguing, by conveying a sense that because we were so obviously enjoying ourselves, anyone not up with the play was seriously missing out. (4)

One can see here that *And* sought to construct a discourse which was mysterious and inscrutable, unreadable, like the face of Mona Lisa. They did not want to "explain" theory "patiently" to the uninitiated, rather they endeavoured to generate interest in it by emphasising its exclusiveness and complexity. *And* was designed to operate as a "discourse of occultation," making its material unintelligible to those who are not familiar with the language of poststructuralism. This strategy empowers those close to the centre of the new critical technologies, while refusing to make sense of these for those on the margins. The intention of this is, Calder states, to encourage people to find out about theory and get "up with the play," which is a laudable goal. However this is still problematic, for, as Ross and Said have observed, while poststructuralism is relatively accessible to "privileged students" (Ross ix), for those without "literary accreditation" (Said 139) it reinforces their exclusion

from power.

One can question then whether *And* could perhaps have been more "revolutionary" if they had chosen to "explain . . . patiently," rather than "pitching it up," as this would have made theory more broadly accessible. That they chose not to operate in this way is a reflection of the phenomenon Barthes describes, where the avant-garde contests bourgeois aesthetics without offering a challenge to bourgeois power (*Mythologies* 139). Another interpretation of this tactic is that the editors of *And* considered that poststructuralism is accessible to anyone who puts in the time to read some theory, an attitude congruent with the neo-liberal up-by-the-bootstraps philosophy about education and social welfare.

And's operation as a "discourse of occultation" becomes clear when we turn our attention to Davis's critical discussions of Allen Curnow and Ian Wedde. Davis uses theory to "annex"⁷ the work of these poets, disempowering them in the process. In addition, Davis introduces another "discourse of legitimation" which is (at the time he was writing) entirely foreign to the study of literature, as he employs models taken from his professional environment at the Treasury.

The impulse behind Davis's critical writing in *And* is primarily to undermine the authority attached to the work of certain prominent figures in New Zealand's literary culture. His attention focuses particularly on Allen Curnow and Ian Wedde, and it is fruitful to consider the selection of these targets, and the means by which Davis's ambushes are executed. It is a commonplace observation to state that the avant-garde impulse is an oedipal one, however it is useful to draw attention to this before addressing Davis's critical engagement with

⁷ This term is borrowed from Davis, who describes Wedde's *Georgicon* as being "annexed by Lacan." "Public Policy" 95.

Curnow and Wedde. The desire to reshape an artistic practice is a desire to wrest control of a particular cultural form from those in authority. For Davis, Curnow and Wedde represent (in distinct ways) figures he must overcome in order to establish his own position. In both cases Davis employs theory as a means of producing destabilising readings of the poets' works, and to consolidate a community defined in opposition to the dominant discourse. However it is the points of difference between his two critiques which are particularly interesting.

(ii) Setting Up Curnow

Genre and history are key terms in Davis's writing, and the relationship between them is important. Davis is concerned with the concept of genre as a historicising device. This is especially evident in Davis's engagement with the work of Allen Curnow, the subject of his Master's thesis and his best known essay, "Solo Curnow." "Set Up," as a manifesto for Davis's project, provides a productive frame for understanding his reading of Curnow. In "Set Up" Davis examines "the abstraction 'New Zealand literature'" (2). He states that the phrase is more useful as one that "isolates the process of reading, writing, and publishing in New Zealand," describing the "contours" of the "industry" of literary production, than as one that seeks to identify "the (idealised) quality of some literary product" (2). This suggestion that the process, rather than the product, is a worthwhile subject for analysis or definition correlates with his understanding of the *And* project as constituted by examples and works in progress. Davis considers that those engaged in the discourse of literature in New Zealand have failed to shift their examination from the identification of "New Zealand literature" as a product to the process by which the multiple "New Zealand literatures" come into being. This failure, and the consequent

difficulties attendant on defining the features of a "New Zealand literature" understood as a product or genre, has caused New Zealand's literary discourse to "age and lapse" (2). The theory with which Davis takes issue is one that identifies the engagement with "New Zealand reality" as the primary requirement of New Zealand literature, and significantly Curnow is identified as the champion of such an understanding of New Zealand's literature.

Davis criticises the idea of a connection between country and literature, asserting that it presupposes that literature's source is to be found in the author's experience of the world, a concept linked with "Romantic, and, later, bourgeois epistemology" (3). Davis's project is to effect a shift from what he refers to as the "vertical" model of literature to a "horizontal" one (3). His definition of "vertical" and "horizontal" is somewhat opaque, but it is related to the usage of these terms in Bruce Andrews's essay "Text and Context." The "vertical" model relies on "solo encounters with some kind of a-historical, timeless reality" (3). It describes literature in which represented reality is privileged as a vehicle for the conveyance of meaning or depth. Davis's sense of a "horizontal approach to literature" prioritises the "historical and cultural factors" upon which all writing is contingent (3). This approach, with its professed emphasis on history, undermines the idea that the product "New Zealand literature" can attain a kind of "timelessness" (3). Davis suggests that the works of Curnow, Stead, Wedde and Paterson are preoccupied with experience and its role in "generating meaning or exploring its absence," and as a result they neglect the "constitutive operations" of culture, history, and language (3).

The way in which form is understood in the discussion and practice of New Zealand literature is further evidence for Davis of the "weakness of the vertical model" (4). He suggests that the primacy of experience in contemporary

literature relegates form to the status of a "surface" or "cosmetic" feature, a "blank or template art convention" which is isolated from the production of meaning (4). Davis sees the acknowledgement of the generative potential of formal characteristics as vital to the improvement of literary discourse in New Zealand. Discussion of form provides leverage when reading a text, as the "[s]ocial connections" of the literature are evidenced by "the collecting of codes or changing structures of behaviour," the recognisable nature of specific forms, and the historical and cultural information they draw attention to (5).

Davis goes on to address the resistance to literary theory in the discourse of New Zealand literature, of which he considers the inability to engage with form to be symptomatic. The objections to theory are that it is "heretical,"⁸ "opaque, Jesuitical or simply poly syllabic [sic]," and that it merely dresses up "common apprehensions" in terms which are unfamiliar and exotic (5). Curnow and C.K. Stead, two writers and critics who "are (or have been) exceptional and almost solitary in the field of New Zealand literature," display the distrust of theory which Davis considers inhibits the development of a meaningful literary discourse (5).⁹ There is a clear parallel here between Curnow and Stead's resistance to literary theory and the anti-theory stance of Muldoon. In "No Theory Permitted on These Premises" Roger Horrocks identifies this connection. However, this article pre-dates Muldoon's defeat, and thus Horrocks does not discuss the fact that *And's* desire to introduce poststructuralism corresponds with Treasury's desire to introduce monetarist economic theory.

The significance of Stead and Curnow is the extent to which their careers are

⁸ Davis notes that "current commentators have a nervous nose for heresay" (5). His spelling of "heresay" here is suggestive — heresy, or hearsay? Is the "nervous nose" for unorthodox views or rumour? Cf. "AUP we have forgotten how to spell," "Set Up" 7.

⁹ Curnow's "Olson as Oracle" lecture (mentioned below), is a notable instance of Curnow's public dismissal of postmodernism.

"paradigmatic" (6). Each has provided a model for understanding and writing about New Zealand literature so influential that these models have hardened into critical orthodoxies. A core assumption of both the Curnow and Stead paradigms as they are described by Davis is that there is a recognisable single New Zealand literature, "writing of a certain stamp" (6), a premise which he finds theoretically naïve. The intention of *And* is in part to destabilise paradigms such as those of Curnow and Stead by undermining the principles on which they are based. Davis surmises that "new pivotal commentators" are unlikely to emerge in the increasingly pluralised literary scene, and that therefore "hegemonic" figures such as Curnow or Stead are now "irreplaceable" (7). He assures his audience that this is not due to "a lack of talent in the pool," but due to the increasing tendency for literary projects to be carried out by "smaller, more rapid figures" with the emphasis on "provisional theories, magazines, and debates . . . ad hoc ventures" (7). Here Davis suggests that the *And* impulse — identifiable in the terms "rapid," "provisional" and "ad hoc" — is displacing the dominant figures of New Zealand literature, as well as the dominant figuring of "New Zealand literature" as originating from an encounter with "New Zealand reality."

Davis draws attention to the failure of university English departments to adopt the new theoretical apparatus that informs the *And* project. They are held back by "academic lags," which could be interpreted as simply delays, as particular individuals lagging behind, or perhaps even as individuals who are habitual convicts of a specific model of academic work. As a result of these "lags" the departments are only able to exert rather clumsy "thick finger[ed]" analysis on emergent literatures (7) — a serious predicament when these literatures are constantly evolving. This comment resonates with the discussion of the education sector's responsibility to reflect labour market demand (eliminating irksome "lags") in the briefing paper *Economic Management* (268). Davis implies

that English departments are not adequately preparing their students (customers?) for the demands of the theorised academic environment. Their lack of responsiveness to international trends in the discipline is, Davis suggests, a dereliction of their duty. Again we see "lags" characterised as an impediment to an efficient programme of reform.

Despite these complaints, Davis managed to produce a thesis with substantial theoretical content in the English Department at Auckland University in 1979.¹⁰ Although Davis's thesis on Curnow predates *And* (which is my primary concern in this chapter), the continuity between his thesis and "Solo Curnow," means some discussion of this earlier work is necessary. His thesis, "Noyade: Genre in Allen Curnow 1935-1972," set out to be "genuinely subversive and experimental" (xiv). It was "to [Davis's] knowledge" the first "reasonably sustained study of this poet, who seems almost to summarize an epoch of New Zealand's literary history" (xvi). Davis states that his work is "consciously designed as a form of theoretical opposition" to the "critical tradition" embodied by Curnow's theory of literature (vii). Davis's project is an ambitious one, and his introduction mixes boldness ("the structure and terms of my argument are solid enough" [i]) with announcements about the provisional quality of his argument, describing his "unerring instinct for what is imposing rather than accurate," labelling his work as "an energetic hypothesis" (i), and declaring that as an "[e]arly attempt" his work was likely to "quickly show rust" (viii). His conclusion states that his attempted "early 'definition' of Curnow's work" was intended to leave Curnow "opened rather than closed," and that his "controversial conclusions" would encourage "new work and interest" (xiv-xv). These comments clearly correlate with the style Davis exhibits in his *And* essays.

¹⁰ His thesis was supervised by Stead. The dissimilarity of their respective positions is described in the introduction to the thesis as "a discussion of differences between gentlemen."

Davis sought to "integrat[e] an area of Marxist pure theory with orthodox procedures of close reading and paraphrase" in order to illustrate how Curnow's oeuvre could be understood as constituting a "genre" (i). The definition of "genre" he provides is "that kind of literature which is created in terms of an evolving pattern of constant elements" (i). Such a (vague) definition allows Davis to read the development of the poet's engagement with the subject of colonisation history — from a "public" to a "private" history ¹¹ — as the marker of "Curnow's genre" (vi). Davis considers that the "formative relationship" Curnow's poetry has with "New Zealand history," gives it a "definition and seriousness that is a structural, narrative quality" (ii). He traces the transition in Curnow's work from a concern with the relationship between the hero ("variously, Colonist, Pioneer, or Settler" (iii), "Victim and Discoverer" [v]) and the "new country" to the use of this trope as a "powerful metaphor for the type of the settler in the country of time" (iv). Davis suggests that Curnow's concern with the inadequacy of language to express reality recasts the "hero's activity" as "that of knowing or discovering" which is "a variant behaviour on the role of settling or being a colonist" (xii). While the early poetry employed "colonisation as a history" the later phase sees the emergence of the Curnow genre, which he terms "new colonisation" (xiii).

¹¹ Davis's use of the terms "public" and "private" here significantly predates his involvement with the writing of *Economic Management*, and it is interesting to note how these terms operate differently in these two contexts. "Public" in Treasury's usage is negatively coded, identified with restrictiveness and regulation, while "private" is a positive term, suggesting independence. In Davis's discussion of Curnow however, both "public" and "private" are terms of reproach. Curnow's "public" poetry seeks to present an archetypal version of the heroic colonist, while his later "private" poetry is concerned with a more personal heroics of discovery (about time and language). For Davis, both these models of poetry display an outmoded desire to represent experience. These terms are borrowed from Curnow himself. In the "Author's Note" to his *Collected Poems 1933-1973*, Curnow identifies this shift from the public to the private in his own work. He says of his early work that it is his contribution to:

the anti-myth about New Zealand . . . [t]he country did not know what to make of itself, colony or nation . . . I wanted, for myself, to focus the vision sharply on a few details of a few scenes of New Zealand history.

He describes his later work, by contrast, as being "of myself and my world." xiii.

Davis's focus on how Curnow's project rehearses and refigures aspects of colonisation history effaces the way in which his own work operates as yet another manifestation of the colonial impulse. His thesis seeks to reveal Curnow's realist convention as an historical edifice, in order that the way can be cleared for the construction of the language-centred poetics Davis valorises. Although this desire is more overt in the essay "Solo Curnow" (a context in which polemic is more appropriate), Davis's emphasis on the "original[ity]" of his project demonstrates the impulse at work in his thesis, and indeed Davis's introduction employs an archetypal colonial metaphor, as he says he has "begun here to work interesting new ground" (i). One can observe that, in this way, he constructs his thesis as a *pioneering* study of Curnow.

"Solo Curnow" is a distillation of elements of Davis's thesis prepared as a Stout Research Centre paper (indicating that by 1984 Davis himself had a certain amount of institutional credibility). The essay rehearses Davis's argument about the Curnow genre and critiques his realism in relation to a more recent collection of poetry, *You will know when you get there* (1982). Relating his experience of Curnow's "Olson as Oracle" lecture at the Turnbull Library, Davis describes the institutional authority Curnow has as a:

recognisable poet . . . someone rightly distinguished, apparently congruent, a synecdoche almost. (50)

Davis notes a "complicity" in Curnow's audience, and describes him, as "drawing upon his citizenry" (50). Davis draws attention to the way in which Curnow's authority has territorial borders, and in doing so he suggests other

territories and alternative constituencies.¹²

Davis declares that his "abiding interest" in Curnow's work is its "emplacement as a prominent example of a New Zealand kind of poetry that is . . . on a point of exit or decline" (50). For Davis Curnow's work is exemplary of an obsolete poetics, and this evaluation is predicated on Davis's contention that there is a continuity between Curnow's early work and his poetry from the 1970s. He argues that *You will know when you get there* reveals Curnow's tendency to "under-write," to "back off," because he is able to "rely on the background textual figures of his past work being present" (50). Davis's essay attempts to "retrieve this background" through discussion of the earlier writing in order to demonstrate both the continuity of Curnow's project and the way in which Curnow's earlier poetry and criticism (his "legitimising discourse") bears on the 1982 book. It is significant that Davis emphasises the context of Curnow's new work in this way because of the contrast between this approach and the one he takes with Wedde. As will be discussed later, Davis's essay "Public Policy" presents a reading of *Georgicon* which is strategically decontextualised. Davis's removal of Wedde's work from its textual "background" effaces the development of Wedde's poetics and the emergence of theoretical information in his criticism. In the case of Curnow however, Davis is able to draw attention to the background work because it corroborates his argument about the continuity of the Curnow "genre." Furthermore, because his argument hinges on this notion of continuity, the admission of Curnow's early poetry into the discussion allows Davis to represent Curnow's more recent work as an anachronistic extension of the project which began in the 1930s.

Davis's desire to consign Curnow's project to literary history is made explicit in

¹² As will be discussed in greater detail in relation to Davis's treatment of Ian Wedde, the figuring of New Zealand literature as a site of battle between warring fiefdoms is a persistent feature of Davis's criticism.

"Solo Curnow." He refers to Curnow's earlier work as being of "archaeological interest now" (50), and throughout the essay he suggests that Curnow's aesthetics continue to conform to modernist and realist principles. His sense that Curnow's work is primarily interesting as an artifact is emphasised by the comparisons he makes between the poet and outdated technology. Describing the importance of Curnow's early work Davis states that elements of it "remain influential in [his] writing as something residual, like a trajectory a Dakota might retain when its motors cut" (50). (The connection of Curnow with a "Dakota" is significant, as the image of this aeroplane appears a number of times in *Willy's Gazette*. In the *Gazette* the Dakota and its pilot are symbols of a modernist heroics, a heroics of adventure and discovery.) Davis describes Curnow's generic features as the "trajectory" of this lumbering emblem of the pre-jet age "when its motors cut," accentuating Davis's sense of Curnow's kind of poetry being "on a point of exit or decline" (50). The modernist assumptions on which Curnow's work is based no longer have power and forward thrust, they are coasting, slowly losing momentum, and Davis anticipates with this image that they will eventually land and grind to a halt.¹³

Another instance of Davis linking Curnow with outmoded technology is his notorious suggestion that Curnow has begun "to look like a 1957 Chrysler" (61). This kind of "oracular utterance" drew attention to the magazine, as it combined "calculated irreverence," the assumption of "enormous authority" and a "defamiliarizing" of literary discourse through the use of surprising metaphors (Williams "On the Margins" 85). The contention behind the 1957 Chrysler statement is that although Curnow's project has been "refined" over the years it has not been "radically changed" or "restructured," a word with important political connotations during this period. The assumption apparent here — that radical change is *a priori* good — is significant as it is characteristic of

¹³ Cf. "That journey's come to its *end*, surely." "Solo Curnow" 59.

both Davis's critical writing and the economic reform programme promoted by Treasury. This celebration of dramatic reversals over "refinements" can be read as another manifestation of the heroics of invention and exploration. Curnow (whose own engagement with these same heroics is one of Davis's favourite grievances) has not responded to market demand and "restructured" his theoretical base, and thus his work is still recognisable as an artifact. Curnow's work may be a style classic, but it is a decidedly period piece (and, to borrow from Davis's thesis, possibly showing a little rust).

Davis has expanded on his use of the Chrysler metaphor in a 1985 *Landfall* interview with Hugh Lauder, in which he makes explicit the connection with Barthes's *Paris Match* essay on the DS Citroën (314). Davis describes the process by which a cultural product moves from being "strange and new" to being "familiar" and then "historical," and states that a Curnow text has an "oddity or a quaintness" as a cultural product from a different era (314). He acknowledges that such a metaphor involves a "cheapening" of the product in question, but argues that "postur[ing]" of this kind is part of the "aggressive . . . marketing" employed by *And* to "differentiate" itself "so as to survive" (314). His desire is not, he claims, to designate Curnow as "*passé*," but to "recover [him] as historical" (315).¹⁴ This is a strategic rhetorical distinction, as it implies that to cast Curnow as "*passé*" would be doing him a disservice, whereas casting him as "historical" is an act of preservation and "recovery" — presumably recovery from being cast as "*passé*." How one distinguishes between these, or on what grounds Davis claims to be "recovering" rather than relegating, is unclear.

An issue Davis raises in "Solo Curnow" in order to situate the Curnow genre historically is the bourgeois epistemology evident in his "effacement of the

¹⁴ Mark Williams has noted the care Davis has taken to "stress the consummateness of [Curnow's] performance" — Davis chooses to respectfully acknowledge and "step beyond" Curnow's "eminence." "On the Margins?" 85-86.

literary" (50):

Curnow doesn't claim to produce a text that is natural, but neither does he want to write 'literature' and, in one sense, he often recoils from the 'non-real.' His writing effaces the sense that he might be writing to a code, while he claims (factitiously) to be 'looking out the window.' (51)

This comment provides useful information about what Davis means by the "literary," something he claims to be bolstering in his note to *Willy's Gazette*.¹⁵ His sense of the "literary" is writing which conforms to certain theoretical standards, primarily displaying an awareness of the role of conventions and the role of language in constructing, rather than describing, reality. Curnow's "literature distrust" is caused by the persistence of "several key modernist tropes" in his work: "the myth of the pure mind and eye of radical perception; and the pursuit of the 'real'" (60). Because of his concern with the inability of language to capture reality, Davis diagnoses that Curnow has "no coherent theory of literature, no conceptual place for literature to exist other than as a kind of lie" (60). The prevailing metaphor in his work is for this reason, "blighted discovery rather than construction" (60). These aspects of Curnow's work lead Davis to apply the term "bourgeois" to him, a word which, in Davis's lexicon, "refers to a kind of cultural naivety, the assumption that key issues of meaning are somehow unrelated to culture or anthropology, or to the social. They are to be found in the subject : object encounter" (60). Davis states that this is evidenced by Curnow's "sense of the philosophical structure of people as mortals or victims who are representative beings-in-the-world" and the absence of "the human" — by which Davis means "consumption preferences, access to

¹⁵ "I wanted to get the 'literary', as a concept, robust again. Some image-train poems seem rather thin." "Note," *Willy's Gazette* unpaginated.

housing or employment, quotidian affections, humour, delight, camel cigarettes"¹⁶ — from his work (60).

Davis's delineation of the term *bourgeois*, which sets it up in opposition to the notion of "the literary," is suggestive. His discussion of Curnow's "literature distrust," and his interpretation of this as part of a "bourgeois" aesthetic, brings us back to Barthes's *Mythologies*. Barthes describes the language of "[c]ontemporary poetry" as one which "resists myth as much as it can," as it is a "regressive semiological system" (133). Where myth "corrupts" a "language-object" by naturalising the concept behind that object, freezing the intention of the utterance, poetry seeks a "pre-semiological state of language,"¹⁷ in which the "sign" can be "transform[ed] . . . back into meaning" (132-33). The ideal of this kind of poetry is not to "reach the meaning of words, but the meaning of things themselves," and these "essentialist ambitions" are related to its desire to be an "anti-language" (133). Barthes describes poets as "the only ones who believe that the meaning of words is only a form," and states that because they are "realists" it is a form with which they "cannot be content" (134). As a consequence of this discontent, poetry "always asserts itself as a murder of language" (134). In Barthes's view, poetry and myth are semiological systems which operate in opposing ways:

myth is a semiological system which has the pretension of transcending itself into a factual system; poetry is a semiological system which has the pretension of contracting into an essential system. (134)

However poetry's "resistance" to myth, "the apparent lack of order of signs,"

¹⁶ Notably this is exactly the kind of information that characterises *Willy's Gazette*.

¹⁷ Cf. Davis in "Roger's Thesaurus," where he states that *The Auckland Regional Transit Poetry Line* "appears as New Zealand's first post-semiological poem." 49.

allows myth to appropriate it, converting this characteristic into "an empty signifier, which will serve to *signify* poetry" (134).

Davis's reading of Curnow, which describes the frustrated relationship between the realist and language, clearly draws on this passage. He states that Curnow "doesn't claim to produce a text that is natural" (in other words, he doesn't produce "myth"), but that he also rejects the notion of writing "literature." Curnow, like Barthes's "contemporary" poets (of which he is one), sees language only as a "form." Moreover, Curnow's status as a poet ("a synecdoche almost") demonstrates Davis's view that Curnow himself has become a figure of mythical significance.

(iii) "Salvo, counter salvo" — Davis versus Wedde

Davis's critical contribution to *And/4* is an essay entitled "Public Policy," which variously discusses *And* itself, language poetry, and the work of Ian Wedde. This essay is one instance in an ongoing dialogue between Davis and Wedde, a dialogue that is distinctly adversarial. Davis's desire to locate his own project as an avant-garde and oppositional one requires that it be differentiated from the practice of established poets. His treatment of the work of Allen Curnow as an historical genre is one expression of this impulse to undermine the influence of major literary figures. While Curnow is a substantial target for Davis, Wedde, as a major 'new' poet of the seventies generation, and, in 1985 the editor (with Harvey McQueen) of the *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, poses a more immediate challenge to Davis's enterprise. John Newton describes Davis's poetic and critical project as a form of "imperialism," and argues that his criticism of Wedde is an expression of "oedipal antagonism" towards the older poet:

As the most prominent figure of that generation now beginning to settle into the exercise of power, Wedde represents perhaps the largest single obstacle to Davis's "take over" of New Zealand literature. (158)

The *And* manifesto "Set Up" specifically identifies Wedde (significantly grouped with Allen Curnow, C.K. Stead and Alistair Paterson) as producing poetry that "goes about its time honoured processes," rather than reflecting theoretical interests in the role of history, culture and language (4).¹⁸ This demonstrates Davis's desire to locate Wedde, like Curnow, as a practitioner of a bourgeois aesthetics. Davis employs Barthes's division between aesthetics and politics in his critique of Wedde, as he seeks to cast him as politically radical but aesthetically bourgeois. Newton points out that Davis's position is defined in opposition to the "socially marginalised counter-culture" of Seventies poets, such as Wedde. Davis suggests that those on the social margins are in fact in the aesthetic mainstream, while his own position is in "the socio-political centre — that is to say, the aesthetic margins" (Newton 184). This position Davis assumes — one of bourgeois affluence and literary vanguardism — confounds the "myth of the artist" as necessarily in a position of material privation (Newton 184).

Davis's review of *Tales of Gotham City* indicates his contempt for this "myth" of the poverty-stricken poet, and furthers his portrayal of Wedde as "out of fashion." What is particularly noteworthy about this review is the emergence of economic argot in the voice of Davis-as-critic. In it he suggests that although the collection's cover is "aware of market change" the poems are not.¹⁹ He describes the poems as conforming to the "lyric pamphlet tradition," and using

¹⁸ This instance has been noted by John Newton 158-59.

¹⁹ It is significant that Davis identifies the cover designers as Mary and Jim Barr, thereby removing the responsibility for this "market awareness" from Wedde himself.

"deep conventions that are having trouble these days" — Wedde, like Curnow has "refined" rather than "restructured" his poetics. His conclusion damningly relegates the work to the status of a historical oddity:

In the end then, this book feels among the last of a kind. Already the audience that makes it just economic, with a subsidy or as a tax write off, may be buying different products. New cultural tensions might make collecting a thin group of poems spanning six years into a curiosity.

It is clear from these critical comments, and from his swipe at Wedde from behind the cover of *Willy* in his *Gazette* ("& when IW put the word out on FS how telling / what a clever message notice on GAPS" [59]), that Davis wishes to oust Wedde from his position of power. His strategy for doing this is to enforce new definitions of what constitutes relevant or innovative poetry, poetry that is "aware of market change," and to ensure that Wedde's work falls outside these boundaries.

Davis considers that *Tales of Gotham City* lacks market appeal, and thus in a competitive literary marketplace Wedde's work is doomed to be eclipsed by more economically savvy projects (like *And* perhaps, or *Willy's Gazette*). For Wedde, Davis suggests, such projects cannot be economic, unless they are produced with the help of a "subsidy" (a dirty word in Treasury in the early eighties), or unless they are merely a "tax write-off." The implication is that the principles of monetarist economics can be applied to the appreciation of literature, and that the "worth" of literature can be measured by the level of consumption "or volume of comment" (Davis Interview with the author 184). Davis offers sound economic advice: from the perspective of someone enlightened in such matters, Wedde should stick to his day job, and talk to his

accountant.

It is interesting to consider "Public Policy" in terms of this invasion of the language of the market into Davis's criticism, and his desire to displace Wedde. The title of this essay is suggestive. As has been noted, Davis has already indicated his own position as a public servant in *And*/2, as at the end of "Roger's Thesaurus" he signs off "Leigh Davis/Treasury" (60). For the *And* audience he is already recognisable as a policy-maker, the creator of new models, and one with his finger on the pulse of market change. Furthermore, this manoeuvre serves to blur the line between his professional capacity and his literary work, commandeering the authority of the former to bolster the latter. Davis's use of the phrase "Public Policy" confers upon his essay the status of a significant document outlining changes to New Zealand's literary direction — it is another manifesto.

Not only the title of this essay reminds us of Davis's professional authority. His earlier references to Wedde as being unfashionable or unresponsive to the demands of the market resonate with certain rhetorical features of "Public Policy." For example, he draws his definition of magazines from a marketing summary: "A magazine is the 'creation and delivery of a standard of living'" (82).²⁰ His echoing of Barthes's phrase "the economy of the subject" in the subtitle "A Wedde Economy" (87), his use of the term "pre-Oedipal economy" (93), and the "economy of discourse toys" (95), all reinforce our awareness of Davis's particular vantage-point at this time — the nerve-centre of the national economy.

²⁰ This statement invites interrogation, particularly given Davis's involvement in both the literary and political spheres. One could easily substitute "public policy" or "economic policy" for "magazine" in this statement. Or one could perhaps also rephrase it to describe *And* as the "creation and delivery of a standard of literature."

The implication of this seems to be that the skills and strategies Davis and his colleagues at Treasury were exercising in their reshaping of the economy are related to those employed in his attempt to create new literary policy. This manoeuvre, like the application of market rhetoric as a tool of literary criticism, elides the difference between literary and economic processes. Davis makes this elision without discussing its legitimacy or its implications, evidencing his belief in a literary marketplace, which operates on the same principles as the rest of the economy. This demonstrates the difference between the "interference" practised by Davis and that valorised by Said, as discussed in chapter one. Where Said would bring literary analysis to bear on economic discourse in order to deconstruct its authority, Davis brings economic theory to bear on literary discourse in order to assert his own authority. Davis blurs the division between disciplines, but he does so to estrange Wedde from his own text, using market-speak as a "discourse of occultation and legitimation."

"Public Policy" is divided into two sections, the first of which, "Unfamiliar Instructions," addresses the editorial policy of *And* through an analogy with language poetry. The starting point for his discussion is the prefix "meta-," which he characterises as an indicator that meaning is "in part the product of a difference, or frame of reference, or as the product of a selected origin" (82). The prefix is "context-aware," as it insists upon the recognition of an origin "behind or on the farther side of" the concept to which it is attached (82-83). Davis relates this to the *And* project by suggesting that magazines serve a similar function to this prefix. He argues that the process of making editorial selections is a "political" one, and that in this way a magazine "construct[s] an origin, 'behind or on the farther side of' [its] entries" (82). A magazine conditions and alters the material it contains, drawing attention away from the particular text and instead interrogating the "unseen prefix" which governs the vehicle as a whole. Davis identifies this process as analogous to the "habit of

language," which is to "distract the reader's scrutiny" from the narrative or representative aspects of a text, thus suggesting that language is a point of origin. A good magazine, in Davis's opinion, encourages this shift of focus from its contents as isolated texts, to their context, and in this way it is "Brechtian" (82).

Davis attributes this Brechtian quality to *And*, as he says that it "is and was designed to be read backwards." The editorial policy, Davis states, was to select material that invited interrogation of its inclusion: "[e]ach selection or entry was made on the basis that it asked the question, How did I get here?" (82). The editors sought to "make NZ writing over" — to recreate it as "language-like, notorious and unreliable" — through the installation of an "estranging agent" in the form of *And* (83). A magazine functions to "transpose [its] entries," providing for them a new and defamiliarising context, and this, Davis suggests, was the intended effect of *And* on New Zealand literature as a whole.

He describes the difference between *And* and more conventional magazines in terms of the way in which texts are treated. His contention is that while magazines generally make texts into "articles," *And* "sought to constitute its texts as *examples*" (83). This implies a sense of the text as a process, or part of a discourse, rather than as a stable representation of its material, and can be seen as analogous to the concept of a language-centred writing expressed by Bruce Andrews: "a *surplus*, not a reduction; an active & continuous constructing rather than a represented content & culture" ("Code Words" 54). Davis characterises language poetry as an "aggressive, revolutionary and possibly transitional form," as it undermines the traditional modes of narrative and representation (86). It is clear that he considers *And* to be a "revolutionary" and "transitional" magazine, having comparable impulses toward opacity and, ultimately, "systematic asemy" (87). He claims that *And* "hardened itself into a prefix" in

order to effect a revolutionary shift in New Zealand's literature. As a "prefix" *And* signifies that texts have been "transmuted into toys," and that "plain and obvious messages" have been supplanted by "analysands" (87).

These statements precede Davis's reading of Wedde's *Georgicon*, a reading which he terms "Lacanian" (87). Newton argues that Davis's use of Lacan is an attempt to conceal the "vehemently personal agenda" of "Public Policy." Newton discusses the "construction" of Lacan in the essay, as Davis appropriates the authority of Lacan by interspersing his own term "Infant Boy" with genuine Lacanian terms without distinction (159; 161). Here Davis employs a subtle exploitation of the shiftiness of language, as he commandeers Lacan's legitimacy by simply giving his phrase "Infant Boy" capital letters (such linguistic shiftiness is reminiscent of Treasury's deployment of the "politics of appropriation"). Davis's Lacan is also largely "unsourced," and his application of concepts such as "Return to Mother narratives" is typically "evasive" (Newton 159-60). Newton also criticises Davis's "obtuse reading gestures," by which he means Davis's determination to expose aspects of Wedde's poetry through his "Lacanian" reading that are in fact foregrounded in the poems themselves. Davis reads *Georgicon* in isolation from the rest of Wedde's oeuvre, and Newton suggests that this removal of context is Davis's way of "manipulat[ing] Wedde into positions of weakness" (160).

In light of Davis's delineation of *And* as a "prefix," it is interesting to consider Wedde's 1986 Book Council Lecture "Virgil in Palmerston North." Wedde's lecture is concerned with the notion of authorial intention, and how the "gap" between this and the reader's reception of a text can be a generative one. For the *And* critics, heavily influenced by Barthes and the language poets, a phrase such as "a writer's intentions" would surely "sound small alarms" (to borrow from Davis). However Wedde is quick to point out that he "do[es] not like or

trust the idea that it's a reader's duty to claw back the writer's intention," and thus that "in general" he does not consider that any reading or interpretation of a text is "wrong" (95). The qualification "in general" is important here. Although he acknowledges the possibility of multiple and diverse interpretations of a text, he suggests that there are instances where readings "have wilfully manipulated the intention involved in [his] writing" (97). "Virgil in Palmerston North" is essentially a response to writing about his poetry that he considers to be guilty of such insincere readings. Three of these instances occur in *And/4*: Davis's "Public Policy," Horrocks's ""Natural" as only you can be': Some readings of contemporary New Zealand poetry," and Wystan Curnow's "Speech Balloons and Conversation Bubbles." Wedde considers that all three of these essays demonstrate a desire to criticise his work regardless of or in contradiction to the "evidence of intention" in the poems (97). He asserts that some critics have not only ignored this "evidence of intention" in individual instances of his work, but have also ignored the signals of his intention found in what he terms (after Derrida) the "legitimising discourse" (96-97). Davis's removal of *Georgicon* from the context of Wedde's earlier work, as identified by Newton in his reading of "Public Policy," is an example of this.

Davis's effacement of *Georgicon*'s "legitimising discourse" makes a marked contrast with his analysis of Curnow. Davis reads *Georgicon* as a text in isolation, and in this way he avoids the need to acknowledge the ways in which Wedde's poetics has developed. The narrow focus of "Public Policy" on a psychoanalytic reading of this single volume means that other aspects of Wedde's work (his inclusion of popular cultural information of various kinds, for example) don't get a look in. This is possibly due to the fact that Wedde is engaging, to some extent at least, with the kind of poetics Davis promotes, which problematises Davis's project of destabilising Wedde's authority.

Wedde's comments about Davis's attack on him in "Public Policy" are limited in comparison with his discussion of the essays by Horrocks and Curnow. He describes Davis as "driving a Lacanian analysis through [*Georgicon*]," suggesting that "Public Policy" demonstrates a rather gauche and brutal reading of the text. He notes that Davis makes a case for reading "A Short History of Rock and Roll" as a "repressed metaphor for sexual intercourse" while ignoring the fact that such metaphors generally inhere in rock and roll. Wedde accuses Davis of reading *Georgicon* "against its clearly marked intentions," but suggests (somewhat disingenuously) that this is perhaps because he is a member of a younger generation and thus is unable to fully grasp those intentions (102). Despite the brevity of these comments, Wedde's essay as a whole encourages a fruitful reading of "Public Policy" in terms of its particular territorial agenda. His comments about Horrocks and Wystan Curnow, as other key figures in the *And* movement, contribute to an understanding of what *And*'s function as a prefix might be.

Wedde focuses on Horrocks's essay, arguing that Horrocks refuses to recognise that the poetry in *Georgicon* conforms in a number of ways with the poetic agenda of the *And* community. In Wedde's view, Horrocks is determined to find *Georgicon* "a product of a certain kind (personal, 'original', monovocal, etc)" despite the fact that "the cover, the quotation, the music framing, the satire, are all announcing the book as at least one version of the product he's in favour of" (101). Horrocks's readings of "Podner" and "A Short History of Rock and Roll" are "disingenuous" in Wedde's opinion, and he suggests that these deliberate misinterpretations evidence a "hidden agenda" (101). This agenda is to draw a distinction between the poetics promoted by the *And* project and the practices of established poets such as Wedde. (This understanding of the *And* impulse concurs with Newton's view of Davis.) Wedde characterises the desire of Horrocks, Davis and Curnow to disassociate his poetics from theirs as

demonstrating the “territorial literary politics” of the *And* project (102).²¹ Horrocks, Wedde argues, has determined to define and fortify the “territory” of the new “new poets” (including Davis) against the old “new poets” (including Wedde).

Wystan Curnow’s discussion of *Tales of Gotham City* is similarly criticised for under-reading Wedde’s work in order to advance a particular agenda:

Not quite an attack, it’s still, like Roger’s essay, a pushing away, a deflection of the proximity of my book to what Wystan likes or approves — it’s another entry in the same hidden agenda. Another border patrol. (102)

Curnow does not read “Gotham City” itself as an indeterminate place, “the kind of place where they still need, or want, heroes,” as Wedde intended (103). He identifies it initially as being “Wedde’s name for the decadent face of Wellington,” before referring near the end to “Auckland (the real Gotham City)” (130; 145), displaying, in Wedde’s eyes, his provincialism (103). Related to this, Wedde also queries Curnow’s comments about collecting things, suggesting that this further demonstrates the territorial attitude of the *And* critics. Wedde depicts Curnow’s [interest] in collecting as possessive, and rather childish: “[t]his defense of his terrain resembles a hugging to the chest of what’s his — his collection, is it?” He suggests that for Curnow Auckland is “the real Gotham City” because it is:

²¹ Davis has discussed the way in which *And* defined itself in opposition to the literary mainstream, suggesting that such positioning is an essential part of “marketing” a cultural product:

in order for someone’s product over here to create and sustain an audience they had to create and sustain a criticism of that which they were different to. *And* is no different from that. It’s almost like factionalism of any kind, you get a group of people with common interests who construct a mythology of difference. Interview with the author 193.

the locus of his defensive perimeter, his fensible homestead. It's where his collection is kept, it's that symbolic site which must be defended against the possible incursions of 'outsiders' . . . against the possibility that his rights to the territory, to the collection, to the right stuff, might already have been breached. (103)

Wedde considers that for Curnow the "collection" he wishes to protect is in part predicated on a certain kind of heroics. The very act of guarding a territory or collection clearly has heroic connotations. However, in Wedde's eyes the reverential attitude of the *And* critics toward certain poets and theorists — who form, perhaps, part of the "collection" — reinforces the modernist notion of "creative demiurges" (103). Wedde's discussion of Curnow is interesting in light of Davis's use of "collecting" as an analogy for both the editing of *And* and language poetry in "Public Policy."

"Public Policy" evidences exactly the kind of boundary-drawing and territorialism that Wedde identifies in the work of Horrocks and Curnow. Davis's characterisation of *And* as functioning like the prefix meta- exemplifies this. In Davis's explanation, *And* has established an "origin" around which it has gathered texts that exhibit certain desirable traits. He states that the editors of *And* sought out "New Zealand vehicles" that displayed a theorised approach to literature in "the same manner as some hunters and collectors have an interest in tribal masks" (82). The notion of the *And* project as one of "collecting" is echoed as Davis refers to the "structural collector's instinct" of the magazine (83). The idea that *And* serves as a display case for the objects fetishised by its editors conforms with Wedde's view. For the *And* critics, perhaps *And* itself is "the real Gotham City" — the "fensible homestead" where they are the gatekeepers and where their collection is stored.

Davis's rhetoric reinforces a sense of the magazine, and the project for which it was the vehicle, as a site or territory to be defended. Davis declares that the fourth and final issue of *And* marks the point "where like resin and banners, *And's* standards are setting" (83). Despite his emphasis on the irony of this statement, it is clear that Davis does mean to suggest that *And* has chosen and staked out its domain, marking it with "banners" and (punningly) "standards." There is a proliferation of phrases pertaining to boundaries, invasions, and art of the periphery or margins, and Davis's "Unfamiliar Instructions" are clearly designed to demarcate *And's* critical province.²² The parallels Davis draws between Cubism and language writing, and between both these movements and the *And* project are scattered with statements such as "Cubism *redrew the boundaries* of art discourse," "language writing presents the *invasion* of the idea of language into the content of the text being made," and "constructing an art of the *peripheral*" (84; 86 emphasis added). The most explicit examples of Davis's territorialism come at the end of "Unfamiliar Instructions":

This then is the *intellectual space* of *And* and of the present paper. It is a *space* capable of *demarcation* at its *peripheries* with an abundance of untried textual models in between. It begins with the *invasion* of the idea of language into texts and subjects. It proceeds in part by exploiting the *margins* of existing art convention. (87 emphasis added)

And again at the start of the second section of the essay, "A Wedde Economy":

Section 1 sets up a *boundary* between the *standard* discourse of New Zealand literary criticism, and the once *non-standard* interests of

²² "Unfamiliar Instructions" is the title of the first section of "Public Policy," 82-87.

And. This section of *my place* extends the *And* discourse . . . to Lacan. (87-88 emphasis added)

The magazine's readership (market) — the constituency of this territory — is assumed to be a select community or interest-group. For the "normative *And* audience," Davis says, post-structuralism "started out as *foreign* but has now become an easy read" (83 emphasis added). He supposes that the community of readers of both *And* and *Splash* is familiar with language poetry, and thus "[f]urther repetition of this idea to this readership seems unnecessary" (84).

As a prefix then, "*And*" signals engagement with poststructuralism and language poetry. "*And*" functions as a code word for a particular (exclusive) mode of discourse, intelligible only to initiates — it flags the "discourse of occultation and legitimation" operating within the magazine. Admission to *And*'s territory is made more difficult by the "restless teleology" of the magazine. As theory becomes an "easy read" for the "normative *And* audience" (83), the territory shifts, introducing new and unfamiliar technologies. Not only is *And*'s territory a fortified site, it is a site which is always on the move.

(iv) Willy's Thesaurus: L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry and the Gazette

In light of Davis's critiques of Curnow and Wedde, "Roger's Thesaurus" (his review of Horrocks's *The Auckland Regional Transit Poetry Line*, published in *And*/2) makes interesting reading. As a member of the *And* community, an accredited participant in its discourse (*he* knows the password), Horrocks's work

is valorised by Davis. This review provides useful information about Davis's poetics, and in this way it enriches or thickens a reading of *Willy's Gazette*.

The dissimilarity between Davis's attitude towards Horrocks's work and that of Curnow and Wedde is due in part to Horrocks's position as one of Davis's co-conspirators in the *And* project. Where Davis's writing about Curnow and Wedde is characterised by what can be seen as an oedipal conflict, his writing about Horrocks is unreservedly enthusiastic, as he identifies with Horrocks's poetic project. Discussing this contrast, Mark Williams has suggested that Davis installs Horrocks as a "substitute poetic father figure, kindly and unthreatening," in order to disguise "his real struggle against Curnow" ("On the Margins?" 86). Certainly there is a sense in which Davis's praise of Horrocks functions to bolster his own position, as the qualities he lauds in *Poetry Line* are ones to which he also aspires.

The Horrocks poem was published in 1982, and it is clear that similar influences have shaped both his and Davis's poetics. What Davis admires so much about Horrocks's work is its theoretical commitment to the notion of language as a constitutive force. He pronounces that *Poetry Line* is "New Zealand's first post-semiological poem," by which he means that while Horrocks's "language carries as prominent, traces of where it comes from and how it has been used," it does this in an "easy" and unselfconscious way (49). This claim differentiates Horrocks's work from that of Curnow, whom Davis characterises as constantly battling with his recalcitrant medium — to employ Barthes's description, Curnow's poetry "attempts to regain . . . a pre-semiological state of language" (*Mythologies* 133). Meanwhile, Horrocks has not merely recognised the operation of language as a semiological system, his poetry has somehow reached a transcendent unity with this system. John Newton has described Davis's review as presenting Horrocks as a "*meta-author*," by which he means

that "mysteriously, [Horrocks] seems to have found a way over to the far side of his own authority" (155).

Indeed Davis does suggest that Horrocks's poetry is driven by the imperatives of language, rather than controlled by the "perceptions" of an author. He praises the way in which Horrocks attempts to efface an "*ab initio* (authorial) stance" (50), and claims that Horrocks has "cause[d] the old author-subject hierarchies to shift," as his poetry is "not ceremonious about an individual's pure or isolated perceptions from a more or less shored space" (49). "Roger's Thesaurus" represents *Poetry Line* as actualising the notion that language itself, rather than the "author," is the origin of the text.

Davis's effusive praise for *Poetry Line* indicates that its ambitions correspond with his own poetics, and because of this common ground, many of the phrases Davis uses in his discussion of *Poetry Line* articulate his own intentions in *Willy's Gazette* — there is a process of identification taking place in "Roger's Thesaurus." Davis's work, like that of Horrocks, is "not ceremonious about an individual's pure or isolated perceptions from a more or less shored space," and hence the *Gazette's* principal figure is difficult to pin down, appearing variously as "Willy," "W," "he," "I" and "you."²³ He describes *Poetry Line* as "operat[ing] as one voice alongside or within a plethora of other codes" and terms it "profoundly intertextual" (58). Again these terms of approbation describe the objectives of the *Gazette*, as Davis's work is remarkably allusive and draws its information from a bewildering array of sources. When he states that *Poetry Line's* "unstoppable lateral organisation, its ability to range and fetch sideways, has implications not just for the practice of writing poetry but also for the linear organisation of language" (58), one can imagine this is exactly the sort of comment Davis would have hoped *Willy's Gazette* would elicit. These common

²³ John Newton discusses the significance of Davis's use of pronouns in detail 144-45; 165-67.

goals indicate the shared interest in developments in contemporary American poetry, namely language poetry.

Language writing was conceived as a radical divergence from the conventional mode of poetry in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as it militated against realism, narrative and the "vertical" conception of writing, with its emphasis on "depth" (Andrews "Text and Context" 32-33). The object of language writing was to make language itself, rather than the meaning represented through it, the matter for inquiry. The rhetoric of Davis's review makes clear his preoccupation with language writing, as it reflects (refracts?) the work of American critics such as Charles Bernstein, Ron Silliman and Bruce Andrews, all of whom are important figures in the *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* project. Aside from the obvious reference to this movement (the quote from Silliman [49-50]), there are numerous resonances, such as the concept of language as a "found" medium, and an awareness of the diverse possibilities of reference. The praise of Horrocks's "co-incidental" position as writer and of his destabilising of the conventional relationship between author and text, has echoes of Andrews (who himself cites Barthes's "The Death of the Author"):

Author dies, writing begins. The subject loses authority, disappears, is *unmade* into a network of relationships, stretching indefinitely. Subject is *deconstructed*, lost, 'diminishing like a figurine at the far end of the literary stage,' deconstituted as writing ranges over the surface. ("Code Words" 54)

Barthes's essay proposes an alteration in the role of the reader effected through the figurative "death" of the author, and hence the authority of the writing subject (*Image Music Text* 142-48). This shift is reflected in Davis's review of *Poetry Line* as he states that the poem is not "based on the notion of the

audience-as-observers, or of reading-as-looking-at," the reader is instead a "particip[ant]" in the text's construction (52). However the language poetry project takes Barthes's notion further, as Newton notes:

A poetics centred in language attempts to literalise this custodial displacement in the context of writing's very production: the author's death is presumed, that is, not just in the reading of texts, but also in the act of composing them. (145)

In "Public Policy," Davis characterises language poetry as the literary equivalent of Cubism, describing Cubism as the point at which visual art rejected representation. The idea of abstracted or formalised representation ("mimesis plus modification," in Davis's words) is replaced in Cubism by "the development of complex, arbitrary signifiers" (83-84). For Davis, Cubism is a rejection of the "look-what-happened-to-me" conception of art (83), and this relates to his criticism of Curnow. Where the reader of Curnow's poetry is confronted with the narrative of his "buried picaro" ("Solo Curnow" 60) and his attempts to represent experience, the reader of language poetry finds a radically dispersed network on the surface of the text, with nothing "buried." Davis describes the reader of language poetry as "often emplaced in a world of an astounding proliferation of mechanisms and polysemy" ("Public Policy" 84). Again this draws on Andrews's Barthes-based essay 'Code Words': "*Dispersion* : the ejaculation of polysemy, 'efflorescence of the signifier,' may come as far as asemy" (55).

This notion of language writing approaching "asemy" relates to Jameson's discussion of the "schizophrenic breakdown of language" ("Postmodernism" 120). In Jameson's analysis, language poetry's "literalizing attention" to words (which converts them to "images"), the corresponding "evaporation" of what

those words signify, and the loss of "temporal continuity" that follows the "breakdown of the relationship between signifiers" reveal it as a "schizophrenic" form of writing (120-22). Jameson convincingly brings together these attributes in relation to schizophrenia, but it is significant that his argument depends upon the theory behind language poetry, rather than language poetry in practice. When he applies his model to a specific language-centred text he finds that his diagnosis does not fit, as the poem in question is not composed of "free-floating material signifiers whose signifieds have evaporated" (123). This is perhaps due to the difficulty of entirely dissolving the connection between signifier and signified. The reader of *Willy's Gazette* certainly encounters a "proliferation of mechanisms and polysemy," as the network of allusion and reference creates the impression of a puzzle. Whether Davis's work could be described as asemic, however, is less clear. Meaning seems more often camouflaged than exempted by Davis, as he creates an *illusion* of arbitrariness.

When one compares Davis's account of the language poetry project to those presented in *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* a revealing divergence becomes evident. While both are heavily Barthes-inflected, there is a Marxist element to the *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* essays that is absent from Davis's explanation. One of the primary objects of language writing according to Silliman, Bernstein, et al., is to undermine the "commodity fetish" in language. Silliman's work, for example, is concerned with the impact of capitalism on language and writing, and the potential for language writing to reject the transformations associated with capitalist reality (122).

Silliman presents an analysis of the development of literary forms, the transition from gestural, tribal forms of poetry to the novel, and the "optical illusion of realism" (126). He identifies as two early phases in the gradual capitalist

metamorphosis of literature as the invention of the alphabet (as "the first movement of the language beyond the physical borders of the individual"), and the emergence of bards (creating a division between a class of producers and a class of consumers). Rather than a poem being the "shared language event" of a tribe or group, it is transformed into a product, and with the advent of printing the division between author and consumer becomes more distinct. The consequence of this, he suggests, has been the rise of the "commodity fetish" in language, which is a fetish for description and reference, and which has "a second high-order fetish of narration" (126). Silliman contends that the forces of capitalism have repressed certain tendencies of tribal, pre-capitalist literatures, privileging depth and realism over the "expressive, gestural . . . nature of language" (124).

While Davis rejects the notions of realism and narrative, his work does display one symptom of Silliman's "commodity fetish" — a kind of fetish for reference. Davis's knowingness comes into play here: he does not straightforwardly manifest this fetish. The fetish for reference, as described by Silliman, is a desire to *represent by referring*. This is a form of the "commodity fetish" because it seeks to pin reality down with language. For Davis however, reference is attractive when it doesn't try to represent. His fetish is for reference as a mode of linguistic play, rather than as a means of representation. Davis (the bricoleur) appropriates images, phrases and fashions in a manner which dissociates them from their original context, thereby encouraging an interrogation of the notion of reference. The significance of cultural material in his poetry becomes exclusively textual, and in this way his appropriation commodifies that material. As will be discussed in chapter three, the dissolving of the connections between references and their referents in the *Gazette* reduces them to images or commodities. Davis is a conspicuous consumer of references, but they are empty references, employed solely for aesthetic (textual) effect — they are

dandyish references. Through his accumulation of decontextualised images in the *Gazette*, Davis seeks to "unma[k]e" his subject position. He desires to actualise the death of the subject (the de-authorised author) by causing this subject to dissolve "into a network of relationships, stretching indefinitely" (Andrews "Code Words" 54).

Chapter Three

"I can't be supposed continuous . . .": Reading the *Gazette*

(Willy's Gazette 19)

(i) "(Willy cuts a dashing figure)"

Willy's Gazette 84.

Davis's major poetic project of the early 1980s, *Willy's Gazette*, is an expansive and difficult text. Its complexity lies primarily in the diversity of sources from which it draws its information, as figures from New Zealand history rub shoulders with (to select a few names among many) David Byrne, John Cabot, Frank Lloyd Wright and Don Quixote, and fashion journalism mingles with market jargon in the poems. This characteristic poses a difficulty for critical writing about the poems, as every allusion and passing reference which appears in the *Gazette* provides a potential point of entry into the text. The process of selecting a particular avenue of inquiry is further complicated by the apparent lack of coherence between Davis's sources, and the impossibility of determining whether one can legitimately attribute significance to any of them as reservoirs of information about his project.

This is, of course, exactly the effect Davis set out to create, and the complexity of the text is in itself highly suggestive. As has been discussed in the previous chapters the difficulty of theoretical information can function to mystify and disempower the marginalised. The accessibility of poststructuralism to the privileged, educated centre described by Ross, and Said's critique of its operation as a "discourse of occultation and legitimation" have been appealed to in relation to *And's* aggressive project. Such an analysis seems more readily applicable to theorised criticism than to poetry, but in the case of *Willy's Gazette* it is useful, and in fact necessary, to consider how its complexity functions. The network of allusion and reference in the *Gazette* is so dense that when navigating a path through the poems one is constantly confronted by obstacles. Willy casts his net wide, drawing in flotsam and jetsam:

tossing off a line each moment..

how free is Willy, composing with his felttip

his KREUZER JET, casting his net upon the waters (31)

Dead ends and red herrings doubtless abound, and for the reader the experience is one of bewilderment and alienation. The extraordinary diversity of Davis's sources compounds this, as he appears to be an expert in everything from art history to Maori mythology, including, of course, literature and economics. The ease with which he throws together the trivial and the abstruse gives the impression of exceptional erudition, which automatically engenders in his audience admiration and (commonly) a sense of inadequacy. It is unlikely that any reader of the *Gazette* can recognise and interpret all the information it contains without recourse to reference books. Because of this, trying to make sense of the poems is hard work, and at times frustrating. The baffling proliferation of textual threads in *Willy's Gazette* is evidence of its operation as a "discourse of occultation" (to use Said's now familiar phrase).

The difficulty of the text also "legitimises" Davis's work, as what is hard to interpret is also hard to critique. Here we return to the "cult of expertise" discussed by Said, and the way in which it inhibits debate (about literature, or politics) for those without "professional . . . accreditation" in a particular field (139-40). The confident deployment of obscure information operates in a similar way to Treasury's use of highly theorised economic jargon as, unless one is an insider in the discourse, one has no authority to question it. This may explain the noticeable paucity of critical writing about the *Gazette*. Aside from John Newton's Master's thesis, commentary about *Willy's Gazette* is limited to a handful of reviews and fleeting references in the introductions to poetry anthologies. It is regarded as a significant text, and has been recognised as such since the mid-1980s, when Iain Sharp described it as "the most important volume of poetry produced in this country so far this

decade" (Rev of WG 385), and yet it has provoked little discussion. One can perhaps attribute this to an anxiety among critics about addressing a text which works so hard to exclude and evade them at every turn. This resistance (one of Davis's favourite terms of approbation) to interpretation is clearly a deliberate strategy on Davis's part, and in fact he draws attention to it in the poems themselves. On a couple of occasions he addresses the reader and specifically refers to the difficulty he anticipates they will encounter. The reader is told that if they are managing to unpack (unpick?) the poem they are doing well, and they are advised on a strategy for dealing with its complexity:

... if sharp you can sketch
it plain navy or scarlet and
cut it with canny strokes of
scissors unhesitant or rightly
hesitant, reader, following the veer line
of the toile the canvas
pattern of a finished jacket Willy's
template ... (49)

He later congratulates the reader for their forbearance:

... for you
lasting through all this sticking
by well done reader! (66)

When a text is so self-consciously "unreadable" (to use another of Davis's terms), and when the author makes these sardonic gestures toward the reader's perplexity, perhaps it is not surprising that so little criticism has appeared about it.

Davis's richly allusive text is not, of course, merely a reflection of his desire to produce difficult poetry. The poems in the *Gazette* encourage the interrogation of the very idea of reference in literature, and this concern is related to Davis's engagement with the poetics of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E movement. In the context of this thesis Davis's accumulation of cultural information in the *Gazette* is interesting because of the way in which it actualises the cultural phenomena Jameson describes as "postmodern." The *Gazette's* appropriation of styles and images is a particularly self-conscious form of pastiche, as Davis is aware of the way in which his material accrues textual meaning while becoming divorced from its past. The rapid-fire allusion and constant flux of the text also parallels the social changes Jameson describes, as the acceleration and the increasing "penetration" of the media transform "reality into images" ("Postmodernism" 124). In Jameson's view this transformation is coupled with a "fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents," and these effect a loss of historical consciousness. The relationship between these phenomena and Davis's work is intriguing. He exemplifies some of the habits of postmodern art described by Jameson, but due to his double consciousness — as both critic and practitioner of poetry — their manifestation in the *Gazette* is not simply symptomatic of a loss of historical consciousness on Davis's part, rather it demonstrates his own fascination with history and its representation.

The connection between speed and history is implicit in what Jameson says above. His notion of time becoming "fragment[ed]" and reduced to a "series of perpetual presents" suggests that the acceleration of cultural change disconnects us from the continuum of history. With the development of "planned obsolescence," "an ever more rapid rhythm of fashion and styling changes," and "the media saturation of news," the recession of events into the past becomes swifter ("Postmodernism" 124-25), blurring our perception of history.

It is significant in light of this that *Willy's Gazette* displays a fascination with media images and particularly the world of print journalism. Willy himself is frequently described as an editor, and Davis's "Note" to the *Gazette* states that he intended it to be "as close as [he] could get to something from Reuter or Condé Nast . . . that timeful." He goes on to describe his interest in "a sense of recession, in how a cultural product recedes, becomes historical, altering its signals." The *Gazette* was intended, Davis's prefatory statement signals, to be self-consciously of its time. His invocation of the news agency Reuters suggests both a desire to record current events and an awareness of the historical and institutional contingency of news-reporting as a project. It is clear from this that Davis sought to produce a "gazette" in the sense of a "news-sheet; a periodical publication giving an account of current events" (*OED* 6: 412).

For Davis the recession of his text into history is something to be eagerly anticipated, as it will produce new "signals" and significance. Where Jameson sees the culture of rapid obsolescence as destructive of history, Davis sees it as generative of history. This opposition reveals a fundamental difference in what is meant by "history" in the work of Jameson and Davis. When Jameson writes about the loss of history he is addressing, from his Marxist standpoint, the effacement of the ideological and political significance of past events. Jameson has an investment in history as a source of moral and ethical information, and thus its reduction to a series of images and styles is, for him, a corruption of historical consciousness. For Davis on the other hand, history is *about* obsolescence and recession. History is where things go when they're no longer new. History is what he, with his enthusiasm for innovation and speed, constantly defines himself against, and his brand of historical awareness is the recognition that every innovation becomes historical. Davis is interested in history as a "storehouse" of images and information (WG 71; 76), but the appeal of these images is the way they take on new (textual) significance. Davis's critique of Curnow demonstrates

this treatment of history, particularly through the use of Dakota and '57 Chrysler images. The awkward distinction he proposes in the Lauder interview between defining Curnow as "*passé*" and "recovering him as historical" (315) reveals Davis's wariness about simply using "historical" as a synonym for "outmoded." He wants us to recognise a difference between "Curnow? He's historical" and "Curnow? He's *history*."

Davis's awareness about the recession of his own project into history is prominent in both *And* and the *Gazette*. This common ground is signalled clearly from the outset, as the *Gazette* advertises its association with the magazine through its title and the self-consciously transient style of its production. The production style of the original 1983 edition draws heavily on that of *And*, sharing its distinctive A4 portrait format and appealing to the same punk aesthetic with its cheaply photocopied interior.¹ Both ventures anticipate their obsolescence and, significantly, they anticipate that this obsolescence will be almost immediate. This is connected with Davis's valorisation of speed — the acceleration of culture and innovation means that things begin to date before the ink is dry, and Davis revels in this. The rapidity with which the *Gazette* is designed to become "historical" can be read as another aspect of the difficulty of the text. By the time the reader has figured out what the *Gazette*'s all about, both Davis and Willy will have moved on — they're the gingerbread men.

The idea that the reader is grasping at a figure rapidly disappearing into the distance is recurrent in the *Gazette*, and this is one of the ways in which Davis ensures that Willy himself is impossible to pin down. Willy is not a Chrysler but

... a chevrolet

¹ The second edition of the *Gazette*, published in 1999, differs dramatically in production style from the 1983 version. The significance of the re-issue is discussed below, 148-51.

..a late model 4-door saloon, in history..
 Cartier-Bresson catches the whole car
 disappearing and leaving a moment's tail-light (9)

We can see nothing but the evidence of Willy moving on, as he recedes into a momentary point of light. He's leaving us in the dust. Further through the *Gazette* Davis describes "visits to an old gazette, where Willy disappears / into space" (27), the "old gazette" possibly being a reference to the future of his own text. Later still Willy's "running / he's become endless and wide / light on the delta" (67). All of these instances present Willy not only as something distant, but as something utterly intangible — space or light, with the former's connotation of endlessness,² and the latter's of speed. This intangibility corresponds with the way Willy does not maintain a constant position in relation to the text, as he is often talked about in the third person — variously he, Willy, willis, W — but also appears as "I" and "you."³

Elsewhere Willy appears as a figure always out of reach. He materialises above our heads:

... All he does
 is rise over the Reserve Bank
 crying and hanging like a bird
 himself silly in the updraft ... (52)

frolicking in the hot air which wafts from the citadels of power. He is sighted (sited/cited) off the coast:

... When you

² Cf. "your line so charcoal grey and endless" WG 97.

³ See Newton, 144-45, 165-67.

look at Willy he's unassuming
 a casual arced wetback some
 distance off the peninsula . . . (70)

He is distant in this way "because you [reader] have not resolved him" (71), and this lack of resolution is because of the difficulty of the text, and because Willy keeps shifting:

he gathers large his diction his composure
 the writing twists and confronts
 he blooms when you sleep he
 wont go . . . (71)

Willy's "diction" is gathered from many sources and the writing is complex; moreover he is so dynamic that if you're caught napping he's liable to have reinvented himself. Although the reader cannot "resolve" him, pin him down or decode him, Willy "wont go." As he recedes into history (out of reach) he becomes a residual figure, part of the reader's collection of historical and literary information:

chattering deep inside your
 storehouse your magazines he's
 calling (71)

Willy is a kind of persistent phantasm. He is always there, "chattering" in the text, but one can not grasp him fully because he is constantly on the move, and because he just disappears into "space" and "light." Davis indicates in the *Gazette* that Willy's perpetual motion will always keep him at least one step ahead of the reader, even after the text has become what he himself would term an "artifact":

... And you have only to stop
 and read and latent
 Willy after several years will a-
muse, as the archaic French
 has it, vivid & (avant) will advance
 another unhesitant ready
 step, whenever you go that way. (72)

Willy might lie dormant between readings, but he retains his capacity to "a-muse" /amuse, he remains "vivid," and he will still be "avant" the garde, wherever it happens to have moved to. Willy is "consumer durable" (9) because he is constantly refashioned. He is ready to move forward again without hesitation if the reader gets too close: "There's a footprint on the / beach I've got to run" (77) — if you want to catch him, you'd better not stop for lunch.

One can see then that there are two ways in which *Willy's Gazette* resists criticism. The enormous diversity of sources the text draws on alienates the reader from the text and confounds critique, operating as a "discourse of occultation and legitimation." The preoccupation with rapidity and constant movement, and the related idea of the swift recession of "cultural products" into history, makes analysis difficult because of the implication that the reader can never quite catch up with either Davis or Willy.⁴ Recalling Douglas, "the fire of opponents is much less accurate if they have to shoot at a moving target" (225). Willy's shiftiness has been briefly discussed, but this same characteristic can be seen in his creator. Davis's passion for innovation results in the constant restructuring of his own project, a process which is hinted at in *And*, but which is much clearer when one considers his complete

⁴ In 1999, discussing the continuities between his early work and *Te Tangi a te Matuhi*, Davis himself has noted this, saying of the *Gazette*: "as I read it now — it never quite arrives, it's always chasing some shift in meaning. So it's all about shiftiness." Interview with the author 175.

oeuvre. While this thesis cannot include discussion of his more recent publications it is important to acknowledge that Davis's productions as a "language worker"⁵ have developed new interests and have employed new technologies — particularly the speed-enhancing technologies of the digital age. Iain Sharp observed that given Davis's pronouncement in *And/1* that "literary history is measured in weeks" ("Set Up" 7), his 1985 review was "two years late" (Rev. of WG 385). By now, Davis has well and truly moved on from Willy and his *Gazette*. This thesis has arrived two decades late.

(ii) "super remote men beyond speed"

Willy's Gazette, 5.

A recurrent motif in the *Gazette* which has specific relevance to the notions of speed and history is the world of aeroplanes and, in particular, their pilots. Davis employs a distinction between the aviators of the pre-jet age and the "jet-man" (a figure drawn from Barthes's *Mythologies*) as a representation of his quarrel with subject-centred poetics. The jet-man appears in the *Gazette* as an idealised emblem of the postmodern world:

' . . . shall I (lessee) be like
a jetman high with bright controls?
. . . stand upon that hill, quite still,
there being a clean line from the quarry
down the diminishing sea-line?' Salt-blind
Willy catches the sun
in bits and pieces, stranding,
real, without stop, dreaming of fish
or super remote men beyond speed he zips,

⁵ For Davis's explanation of his preference for the term "language worker" over "poet" see my interview with him 180.

fuelling on Paris Match, 1981 and Barthes. (5)

Willy's desire to be "like/a jet man," one of the "super-remote men beyond speed," is fuelled by significant cultural phenomena: "Paris Match" (the source of the article that Barthes's essay is a response to), "1981" (a year of pivotal importance in the reshaping of New Zealand's political landscape), and the intellectual excitement accompanying French post-structuralism (for which "Barthes" stands here as a kind of metonymy). These references illustrate how Willy is a subject constructed by a range of discourses — he is drawn from the media, current events, and literary theory. And like a good postmodern subject Willy is well aware of his own constructedness. The jet aircraft is represented in stark contrast with the recurrent "Dakota" imagery, which emphasises drabness and primitiveness. Willy notes that "All day Boeings fly past the office" (23), and later describes "a nice Boeing, so sharp and blue,/with the sunshine" (41), clearly identifying the modern jet as an object for admiration. Davis's characterisation of these two phases of aviation thus provides information about his understanding of the relationship between speed, history and literature.

The pilot of the pre-jet age is most closely associated in the *Gazette* with Curnow. The image of the Dakota, which appears in "Solo Curnow," is also used in the *Gazette* to signify the modernist heroics Davis so abhors. In order to indicate how this connection operates, it is necessary to consider briefly Barthes's discussion of the alteration of the mythology of the pilot, and the mythology of speed as an experience. He says of the pre-jet age pilot:

The hero of classical speed could remain a 'gentleman,' inasmuch as motion was for him an occasional exploit, for which courage alone was required: one went faster in bursts, like a daring amateur, not like a professional, one sought an

'intoxication,' one came to motion with an age old moralizing which made its perception keener and enabled one to express its philosophy. It is inasmuch as speed was an *adventure* that it linked the airman to a whole series of human roles. (71)

The mythology of this figure, then, is one of bravado and amateurism. The pilot flies for the physical sensation of speed (which "intoxicates"), and his cultural background enhances his awareness of speed. He is "linked" to others through the nature of his experience as an "*adventure*" — his "humanism" is reinforced through the "occasional" and extraordinary nature of his activity.

By contrast, the pilot of the jet-age is defined by his apartness. He is part of "a new race in aviation, nearer to the robot than the hero"(71). He is distinguished from the traditional aviator-hero through the loss of his "humanism." The "jet-man" is defined less by desire for adventure than by the science-fiction quality of the speed at which he travels, his "racial apartness," and a "monastic" asceticism of lifestyle (71-72). Consistent with his robotic persona, the jet-man is not driven by passion or excitement, neither does he experience the sensation of speed. This paradox, where "an excess of speed turns into repose," creates a mythology of the jet-man entirely different to that of the "pilot-hero." His experience is one of "pure coenaesthesia," as the sensory experience of motion is reduced to a "vertical disorder" or "inner devastation." Barthes describes him as "*overtaking motion*" and "going faster than speed" (71), in the manner of the "super remote men beyond speed" of whom Willy dreams (WG 5).

Here Barthes establishes an opposition between the aviator-hero, for whom the experience of speed *constructs* a human, social role, and the jet-man, whose speed is so great that both experience and humanism are erased. The jet-man is not driven by "adventure or destiny" as the pilot-hero is, but

knows "only a condition" (71). This condition is "anthropological" rather than "human," as it does not emerge from the jet-man himself (as "courage" does for the pre-jet pilot), but from the cultural signals attached to him: "his weight, his diet, and his habits" (71-72). The mythology of the jet-man

make[s] manifest the plasticity of the flesh, its submission to collective ends . . . and it is this submission which is offered as a sacrifice to the glamorous singularity of an inhuman condition.
(72)

For Davis, this distinction provides an analogy for the opposition between modernist and postmodernist poetics. The heroics attached to the experience of an individual pilot parallels the heroics of the subject in modernist poetry. For the modernist, "adventure," "destiny" and experience are central to the representation of the subject as heroic in his/her individual humanism. Conversely the postmodern subject is determinedly "anthropological," made out of culture and language. The "vertical disorder" and "inner devastation" of the jet-man correspond with the presentation of the subject in the postmodern poetry Davis valorises — a fragmented, chaotic assemblage of discourses.

The figure of the aviator-hero in the *Gazette* is most clearly represented through the image of the Dakota, which, as has been noted, makes explicit the connection between the modernist heroics of flight and the poetics of Curnow. In sonnet 35 Willy "land[s] his own Dakota" and is compared to New Zealand's early aviator Richard Pearse.⁶ In "Solo Curnow" Davis compares the "trajectory a Dakota might retain when its motors cut" to the "residual" nature of Curnow's poetics (50), suggesting that these poetics are heading for a crash. Although the reference to Pearse indicates that Davis

⁶ The historical debate over whether Pearse or the American Wright brothers completed the first successful flight is elided into an affirmation of Pearse's heroic status: "Pearse, who was the first to fly" 35.

views the heroism of the aviator as distinctly historical, there is a sense in which Willy's "landing" of the Dakota exemplifies these heroics.

The Dakota is rapidly losing altitude, having lost its power and forward thrust (typical of such outdated technology, it's always letting you down). It appears to be doomed, until suddenly Willy comes to the rescue. He takes control of the plane and, miraculously, he brings it in for a safe landing. Like the hero of an action-adventure film Willy defies the odds and saves the day. Willy (or is it Davis?) is the man to rescue New Zealand poetry from certain disaster ("This is a job for you, L," [17]), and bringing the Dakota in to land, bringing "that journey . . . to its *end*" ("Solo Curnow" 59) is his first (urgent) priority. There is a comic, self-ironising tone at work here, and the mockery of his own heroic pose (as he projects himself, via Willy, as the saviour of New Zealand literature) replicates the macho posturing of *And/1's* cover-cowboys. Despite this irony, this poem offers an explanation of Davis's comments to Lauder about his historicising of Curnow: perhaps Willy's rescue of the "Dakota" signals what Davis sees as the difference between "recovering" Curnow as "historical" and dismissing him as "*passé*." One can question whether he is implored by the passengers to take control ("Save us, Willy/Davis!") or if he is in fact hijacking the Dakota, pushing aside the inept pilot. Did the "motors cut" spontaneously, or has *he* cut them off?

A more extended representation of the pilot-hero occurs in sonnets 39 and 40, and these instances make clearer how Davis uses the Dakota as a metaphor for Curnow's project:

. . . un aviateur
sinking below the palm trees in a gale -
..the paradigm's flexible, ubiquitous, seen
in swapped trenchcoats before, where Willy draws down
his cargo, drab Dakotas, dipping

on a primitive airstrip where he waits, plain, believing,
 a scarlet bird breaking from the trees
 in simple transport, printed
 over one sky, time, together, (39)

The use of the French "aviateur" signals the connection between Davis's pilot and that of Barthes, and the echo of Curnow's "Parakeets at Karekare" ("Scarlet is a squawk . . . / . . . as the parakeet flies") makes explicit the Dakota's significance. The pilot faces danger (landing in a gale) while performing a distinctly "human role," as the deliverer of cargo. The Dakotas are "drab" but purposeful, and their "cargo" is delivered to a "primitive airstrip," suggesting Davis's impatience with the determined way in which Curnow pursues his poetic programme. Curnow delivers his information while being apparently oblivious to technological development. The derisive attitude toward the aviator-hero correlates with Davis's criticism of the figure of the hero in Curnow's work, who engages in perpetually blighted exploration of land or language (this is his "adventure or destiny" [*Mythologies* 71]). The "airmen" of these sonnets are distinctly humanised (unified, made real) by their performance of "a whole series of human roles" (*Mythologies* 71), as are the victims, colonists, and pioneers of Curnow's poetry.

There is a problem, however, with identifying Davis's aviator-hero with that of Barthes. The pilot in these poems is not Barthes's sensualist hero, flying for "intoxication" (*Mythologies* 71) through speed, although he is, a "humanised" hero through the dangerous nature of his occupation. In order to understand how the pilot of Davis's Dakota represents the "hero of classical speed," despite the fact that he does not fly simply for the sensation, it is helpful to consider Jeffrey Schnapp's distinction between "thrill-based" and "commodity-based" travel (8). In "Crash (Speed as Engine of Individuation)," Schnapp suggests that these two distinct "cultures of

transportation" emerged in the mid-eighteenth century (8). Thrill-based transport privileges the experience of speed, and is often centred on the experience of the driver (or pilot), or on passengers who are "driver-identified." The conception of space as something "*to be consumed*"⁷ as a spectacle is an inherent quality of this thrill-centred culture. Commodity-based transport, by contrast, views space as something "*to be collapsed*," and speed is not an experience but a means of efficiently conveying packages (including people) between two points (8-9). Schnapp states that the requisite velocity for either of these cultures was dependent on technologies that allowed the detachment of "traveler from vehicle and vehicle from context" (such as improved road surfaces, pneumatic tyres, spring suspension). He suggests that while commodity-based transport sought to reinforce this detachment and naturalise speed, thrill-based transport attempted to introduce "*new modes of reattachment*" (8-9), as the driver or passenger of a thrill-machine had the experience (or the illusion) of *authorship* of their speed (18-19).

Schnapp emphasises that this distinction should not be viewed as absolute, and Davis's *Dakota* illustrates one form of compromise between these two modes of transport. The "supply Dakotas" (40) are conveying cargo, and thus they are in a sense operating as "commodity-based" transportation. They are not flying "to 'go in the air'" as Paul Virilio describes the motivation of the earliest aviator-heroes, but "to go somewhere," as they are part of the tradition of "commercial aviation" (26-27). What the *Dakota* signals is the transition of aviation from "thrill" to "commodity," as the technology which originally produced "intoxicating" speed recedes into history, "altering its signals" ("Note"). This is another expression of Davis's understanding of history as a process of recession. In the *Gazette* he alludes to the heroics of the early aviator through the reference to "Pearse, who was the first to fly" (35), and the mockery of a Baxter sonnet, in which the

⁷ Cf. Barthes's "space devoured," *Mythologies* 71.

couplets depict the wings of a biplane:

Here they come David, droning over the
ranges pale red, beating up

in formation, seven to a group,
angels, their stiff little wings and spaces

between their wings . . . (60)

The Dakota signifies the next stage in the continuum of the development of aviation technology. They are period pieces, like the biplane (or the '57 Chrysler), but they are also "drab" and functional — they are not what one would call thrill-machines. Flight had been "intoxicating," but as the innovation dates and becomes historical the mythology associated with it changes. The heroism of the Dakota pilot in the *Gazette* does not originate from his experience of speed, but crucially he is still closer to Barthes's aviator-hero than the jet-man. This is because he still experiences motion (and danger), he consumes space rather than collapsing it (he has the "optical perception of points and surfaces" [*Mythologies* 71], as evidenced by the description of the plane coming in to land [WG 39]), and because he retains what one might term (after Schnapp) the "authorship" of his speed.

This notion of "authorship" is instructive when one considers Davis's use of the analogy between aviation and poetry. While the aviator-hero authors his own speed, the jet-man does not. The jet-man's speed is so great that the experience of motion is eliminated, and this represents an absolute detachment of the traveller from their context. The jet-man relinquishes the authorship of his speed, which is only discernible to the observer outside the plane. Relating this to poetics, the aviator-hero thus signifies writing which is both subject-centred and committed to the notion of the author as the

origin of the text. The jet-man, on the other hand, signifies a "dead" author — one whose "authority" has been transferred to his language. He is, in a sense, the ideal L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poet. When Davis describes Willy as "an editor with his own combinations" ("Note") he indicates that Willy's text is constructed from pre-existent discourses, authored by others. It is significant that Willy, and not Davis, is identified as the "editor" of the *Gazette's* cultural information. The implication is that Willy is not constructed by Davis, but that he has emerged as a textual figure from language itself (or perhaps he has simply flowed out of "his felttip / his KREUZER JET" [31]). Davis's effacement of his own authority through this manoeuvre connects him with the jet-man, as he has relinquished authorship of his text (to Willy, who has in turn relinquished his authorship to language and culture). Again we see the fugitive quality of both Willy and Davis — if Davis is the jet-man he has already disappeared into the distance, leaving behind Willy (his jet-stream), residual but rapidly fading.

The jet-man does not correspond exclusively with Davis or Willy, but both of them. As Davis's exemplar of a "composed, and haphazard" postmodern subject ("Note"), Willy exhibits the "vertical disorder," "contradictions," and "inner devastation" of the jet-man. He is composed of signifiers which sit determinedly on the surface of the text, refusing to offer anything more than an illusion of depth. The incoherence of these signifiers complicates the process of reading him. His "inner devastation" is manifest in the instability of Willy as a figure in the text, his lack of a unified self, as he shifts from subject to object of the sonnets, and as his name mutates. The rapidity with which Willy moves in the text also connects him with the jet-man, as his speed explicitly dehumanises him — he dissolves into "space" (27) or "light" (9; 67) (or perhaps language).

It is noteworthy that these characteristics of "vertical disorder" and "inner devastation" are congruent with the understanding of schizophrenia

advanced by Jameson. Jameson's contention that schizophrenia is related to the demise of historical consciousness is particularly pertinent here. He argues that the schizophrenic does not know "temporal continuity," and thus is "condemned to live in a perpetual present" ("Postmodernism" 119). As the jet-man "overtak[es] motion" and goes "faster than speed" (*Mythologies* 71) he becomes isolated from the experience of time and history. The obliteration of his awareness of movement situates him in a "perpetual present."

This analogy provides more information about the sense of "history" which inheres in Davis's text (and throughout his project). In the *Gazette* Pearse, the biplane and the Dakota signify the development of aviation technology from pure "thrill" to a mixture of "thrill" and "commodity." The mythology of flight alters as it shifts from innovation to history. The jet-man can be read as both the next stage in the continuum of aviation development and as a radical break, as the innovation of jet-technology revolutionises flight. This can be compared with Davis's paradoxical situation of the *And* project as both part of William Carlos Williams's "continuous" magazine and as a point of rupture in New Zealand's literary history, and with his own position as both "subvertor and inheritor of the line of 'mainstream' figures stretching from Curnow through Stead and Wedde" (Williams "Introduction" 29). As has been noted, Davis understands history as a process by which innovations recede, and thus his notion of "historical consciousness" is an awareness that every innovation has its moment and then becomes historical. This interpretation of history reduces past events and innovations to images in the culture (as they are emptied of ideological significance), and the focus is firmly on the newness of the present. Davis is always careful to acknowledge the earlier technologies (the '57 Chrysler, the Dakota, the biplane, Curnow's poetics), but they become reduced to signifiers of early technology, thus demonstrating Jameson's "transformation of reality into images [and] the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents"

("Postmodernism" 124). Davis appears to acknowledge his situation in a continuous literary culture, but at the same time he proclaims his revolutionary difference from that culture; like the jet-man he is part of a tradition, but at the same time his technology makes him alien to and in a sense outside, that history. This contradiction can be explained as an effect of the "fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents," as the continuum of history is replaced by a simulacrum of that continuum.

(iii) "a serial of calm apartments on the water
these sintesi, loose flags of wire and bleached linen..
we are the Futurists.."

Willy's Gazette, 34.

It is important to recognise that while Davis ridicules the heroics of adventure and discovery which characterise the mythology of the pre-jet pilot, there is a new kind of heroics of speed which emerges in his work. As has been discussed, in the *Gazette* Willy's speed operates to make him "unreadable," as he is impossible to catch. This signals how speed in Davis's work is attached to a heroics of being ahead of one's time, and this is related to a sense of historical rupture. Jameson's notion that as the speed of cultural change increases we lose our sense of history clearly correlates with the jet-man's condition, where "an excess of speed turns into repose" (*Mythologies* 71) — his speed places him beyond the "lived experience of time" (Jameson "Postmodernism" 119). Speed then, for the jet-man, becomes a-historical. As the jet passing through the sound barrier creates a rupture of the senses (vision and hearing), so speed in the *Gazette* effects a rupture between history and the present. When Willy dreams of the "super remote men beyond speed" (5) he is imagining a hero who can, in a sense, outrun time and history.

The jet-man's status as an alternative type of hero (despite the apparent antithesis between the "pilot-hero" and the "jet-man") is discussed by Barthes. Barthes's jet-man has "Parsifalian residues," as his mythology becomes characterised by the transformation from quester to monk. Barthes suggests that the qualities required of the jet-man ("continence and temperance, abstention and withdrawal from pleasures, community life, uniform clothing") take on "sacerdotal significance," and that the jet-man is defined by a "religious call" (72). The jet-man is a dehumanised, deromanticised pilot, one who is passive and apparently unheroic due to the removal of sensation from the experience of flight and the processes of a jet engine: "(what is more inert and more dispossessed than an object *expelled in jet-form?*)" (73). However the jet-man is "reintegrate[d]" into the heroics of aviation through the "myth of a fictitious, celestial race." Barthes suggests that the jet pilot's status as a "reified hero" stems from the very fact that he has been dehumanised by technology and speed. He has few of the characteristics of the aviator-hero, but is a hero nonetheless through his peculiarly alien role, effecting "a kind of anthropological compromise between humans and martians" (73).

The jet-man's "reintegrat[ion]" into the heroics of speed reveals the influence of Futurism in the understanding of speed in the work of both Barthes and Davis. It is interesting to briefly address how this influence is manifest firstly due to Futurism's celebration of speed as a tool for reshaping both art and politics, and secondly due to the appearance of references to the Futurist and Vorticist movements in the *Gazette* and throughout Davis's oeuvre.⁸ Marjorie Perloff describes the persistence of Futurism in the work of Barthes

⁸ Vorticism was a movement based in Britain which was contemporaneous with Futurism. Although it would be inappropriate to suggest that these projects were identical, they shared a fascination with speed and technology. Perloff considers that the critical discourse about the relationship between Futurism and Vorticism has been dominated by a tendency to regard the attacks made by Lewis and Pound on Marinetti and the Futurist movement as evidence that the projects were oppositional to one another. She argues that in fact the hostility was caused by "the aggressive nationalism of the *avant guerre*," which was a feature of both movements, rather than disagreement over aesthetic principles (171).

as evidence of the "disillusioned or cool Futurism" of the postmodern era (195).

Marinetti's 1909 "Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" gives an account of the night of the movement's conception, and graphically demonstrates the extent to which the Futurists were inspired by new technologies of speed, and the capacity for these technologies to induce both rapture and calamity (or, more precisely, rapture *through* calamity). Marinetti describes an atmosphere of feverish intellectual excitement, culminating in a decision to go driving inspired by the sound of vehicles in the street. Travelling at high speed, Marinetti is forced to swerve suddenly by the appearance of two cyclists, and his Fiat is upended in a muddy ditch (significantly it is the precursor technology that is culpable) (39-40). The car crash is a formative event for Marinetti, as it is the moment when the rapture/rupture fusion effected by technology becomes manifest.

The visionary "Manifesto" which emerges with Marinetti from the ditch proposes eleven Futurist commandments, all of which are grounded in the general principle of a radical break with artistic convention, history, and academic tradition. This rupture is to be brought about through speed, technology and violence. One can see here a clear correlation between Davis's project and that of the Futurists, as he seeks a rupture in New Zealand's literary tradition through similar means.⁹ Marinetti identifies speed as the world's "new beauty," suggesting that "Time and Space" have been superseded by the "absolute" of an "eternal, omnipresent speed" (41). The "Manifesto" advertises a new hierarchy of aesthetic values, one that privileges speed and technology over classical or time-honoured exemplars of art.

⁹ It is interesting also to recall here Roger Douglas's demand for speed and aggression in the restructuring of the economy, Douglas 222-25.

For Marinetti speed represents a means of transcending time and history (in the manner of Barthes's jet-man). He militates against "Christian morality," which he states "served to develop man's inner life. Today it has lost its reason for existing because it has been emptied of all divinity." The "*Futurist morality*" will defend man from the decay caused by slowness, by memory, by repose and habit. Human energy centupled by speed will master Time and Space ("The New Religion-Morality of Speed" 94). This indicates a connection between the valorisation of speed in the discourse of both the Futurists and Davis. Where Marinetti sees speed replacing the development of "man's inner life" through "Christian morality," Davis sees speed as a way of escaping the very idea of that "inner life."¹⁰ The difference between these two conceptions demonstrates how "postmodern" Futurism is (to use Perloff's phrase) "disillusioned or cool," as the postmodern distrust of the notion of a unified subject is inherent in Davis's use of speed. While Davis certainly regards "slowness . . . memory . . . repose and habit" as the causes of "decay," he does not propose that speed can provide a new "morality," as the notion of morality is problematised by postmodernism's abandonment of such universals. Davis's speed is, in a sense, a means of escaping both history ("master[ing] Time and Space") and essentialist notions of morality.

Although Davis does not view speed as a source of "morality", it is interesting to consider Marinetti's "religion-morality of speed," which proposes a schema of virtue, sin and punishment. The foundation for the religion of speed is expressed thus:

¹⁰ The issue of Davis's Christianity is interesting here, although it is an aspect of his work which is not addressed in this thesis. A reflection on the role of Christianity in the wedding ceremony of Leigh and Susan Davis was published in *Rapport* in June 1980. This discusses their desire for the ceremony to be "stylised and conforming, archaic and actually christian," while "speak[ing]" the Bible "newly." They found that the Bible, "a canonised book," was "grafted on and fitted [them] illy." One could compare this desire to have an "archaic" and "christian" ceremony which also "speaks newly" with the desire evident in Davis's literary work to take part in New Zealand's literary tradition while also refiguring that tradition. Leigh and Susan Davis, "Mistress Polly and Awesome Urban," 52-55.

Speed, having as its essence the intuitive synthesis of every force in movement is naturally *pure*. Slowness, having as its essence the rational analysis of every exhaustion in repose, is naturally *unclean*. After the destruction of the antique good and the antique evil, we create a new good, speed, and a new evil, slowness. ("Religion-Morality" 95)

Marinetti continues with a series of equations demonstrating the ideological division between speed and slowness:

Speed = synthesis of every courage in action. Aggressive and warlike.

Slowness = analysis of every stagnant prudence. Passive and pacifistic.

Speed = scorn of obstacles, desire for the new and unexplored. Modernity, hygiene.

Slowness = arrest, ecstasy, immobile adoration of obstacles, nostalgia for the already seen, idealization of exhaustion and rest, pessimism about the unexplored. Rancid romanticism of the wild, wandering poet and the long-haired, bespectacled dirty philosopher. ("Religion-Morality" 95-96)

This material is highly suggestive, and justice cannot be done to it here; however there are a few points which should be noted. Speed is characterised by Marinetti as "pure," and one can draw an analogy between this and the effect of speed on Willy in the *Gazette*. Willy's speed purifies him, emptying out all the troublesome characteristics of a poetic subject, as the reader cannot grasp him. He is purged, through speed, of a stable,

unified subject position. The contrast between the speed of the Dakota and that of the jet signals that, in this sense, the poetry of Curnow is "unclean" — he doesn't move fast enough to escape his own subjectivity. One can see another connection between Marinetti's document and Davis's quarrel with Curnow. Marinetti's opposition between "speed" and "slowness" identifies the "immobile adoration of obstacles, nostalgia for the already seen, idealization of exhaustion and rest, pessimism about the unexplored," and these qualities resonate with Davis's criticism of Curnow. Similarly, the "[r]ancid romanticism of the wild wandering poet and the long-haired, bespectacled dirty philosopher," approximates Davis's attitude towards Baxter:

... Barefoot for forty miles in the rain,
kenosis, (who were you reading) ..
Then our literati were known for their sandals,
their misery ... (WG 3)

Worship of Marinetti's new divinity is carried out by "running at high speed" or by praying at railway tracks or gyroscopes. The male saints of this new religion are "the numberless corpuscles that penetrate our atmosphere at an average velocity of 42,000 meters a second", while the female saints are "the light and electromagnetic waves at 3×10^{10} meters a second" ("Religion-Morality" 96). Although, as has been noted, Davis would not identify speed with "divinity," it is interesting to note that in Marinetti's terms Willy is a Futurist "saint," as he has a habit of dissolving into space and light.

The influence of Futurism can be seen in Davis's poetics more generally, as Marinetti's theory of poetry has an affinity with later avant-garde poetry, particularly L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E writing. His "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature" (1912) proposes a new literary style inspired by the

experience of speed through flight:

Sitting on the gas tank of an airplane, my stomach warmed by the pilot's head, I sensed the ridiculous inanity of the old syntax inherited from Homer. A pressing need to liberate words, to drag them out of their prison in the Latin period! ("Futurist Literature" 84)

Marinetti attributes a form of creative liberation to the development of aviation, as the poet is freed of syntax, has their perspective expanded (to god-like proportions) and is able, through the appropriation of mechanical speed to literature, to engage in immediate, rapid-fire use of images and allusion without traditional constraints.

The notion of words-in-freedom (variously called *parole in libertà* or *parolibere*) effected through speed is refigured in Charles Olson's 1950 essay "Projective Verse," which has become an important document in the genealogy of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E movement. Olson opens with three prescriptions for "projective or OPEN verse," the first of which is the awareness of the "*kinetics*" of the poem (239). Olson, like the Futurists and Vorticists, emphasises the primacy of energy in poetry:

A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it . . . by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader . . . Then the poem itself must, at all points, be a high energy construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge. (240)

His second principle is that "FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT," and that "the right form, in any given poem, is the only and exclusively possible extension of content under hand" (240). This understanding of form is one which correlates with Davis's own view,

as he describes in *And/1* the disappointing habit of New Zealand literature to regard form as a "blank or template art convention" ("Set Up" 5). The third principle Olson proposes is directly associated with Futurist poetics:

ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY
LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION . . . get on with it, keep
moving, keep in, speed, the nerves, their speed, the perceptions,
theirs, the acts, the split second acts, the whole business, keep it
moving as fast as you can citizen. And if you also set up as a
poet, USE USE USE the process at all points . . . always, always
one perception must must must MOVE, INSTANTER, ON
ANOTHER!

So there we are, fast, there's the dogma. (240-41)

Returning to Olson's Futurist precursor, Marinetti's prescription for literature requires the rejection of conventional syntax, and an awareness of the materiality of language. He advocates the exploitation of typography for effect in poetry, and the introduction of symbols other than the alphabet, such as mathematical and musical signs.¹¹ These characteristics are carried over into the techniques of some L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets, and are evident in *Willy's Gazette*. Davis certainly abandons standard syntax, also disregarding the restraints of the sonnet form (as some of his sonnets run together into much longer poems). In the *Gazette*, he incorporates symbols and mathematical formulae, such as " ΔE 's some function of (r)" (33), " e^{-bt} " (46), " ΔCG " (78), and in "Time the destroyer" an extended series of formulae and a tree-diagram figure prominently in the sonnet with equations such as " $P(X+Y=6)$ " and " $(x-x)^2 p(x)$ " (85). Another of Marinetti's demands is that literature attempt to capture the sounds produced by technology, "[t]o listen to motors and to reproduce their conversations" ("Futurist Literature" 88).

¹¹ See Marinetti, "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature," 85; Marinetti, "Geometric and Mechanical Splendour and the Numerical Sensibility," 102-3.

Davis fulfils this requirement also, imitating the sound of gun-fire from a plane,

the slow expressionless
jigging of the high Dakota,
explosives (ack ack).. (75)

In another sonnet Davis includes mechanical (automotive) sound effects in a dramatic scene,

‘Hey Pierrot!

well come on in’
(schnick.. clunch-nch)

there now, so.. (somewhere here) uh huh,
I’ve got it, cinch it up.. (varoom) (86)

Of course Davis is using these sound effects in a fashionably ironised way, and this brings us back to Perloff’s assertion that postmodernism displays a “disillusioned or cool Futurism” (195). Davis’s appeal to Futurism is, above all, *knowing*.

Perloff relates the tendencies of the Futurist “moment” to more recent theoretical and artistic work. She suggests that Futurism has parallels with “the contemporary dissolution of the boundaries between art and science, between literature and theory, between the separate genres and media.” As has been noted, Davis’s work is intended to exemplify this blending of literary theory and practice, and also blurs the boundary between literary and economic discourse. Perloff’s contention is that Barthes, like the Futurists, demonstrates a fascination with technology, and that his interest in

the role of technology in the development of cultural mythologies is part of the Futurist legacy. Perloff qualifies this continuity by suggesting that Futurism is revised in Barthes's writing, and that the version of Futurism he displays is (like that of Davis) ironised and problematised (195).

The jet-man of Barthes (and Davis) is highly significant when considering Perloff's claim. Barthes's jet-man is affectless, and this is certainly the most substantial point of difference between the pilots of Barthes and Marinetti. In both instances the speed of flight is figured as transformative of human subjectivity, but for Marinetti it enhances and broadens sensibility, while for Barthes it obliterates it. To borrow Schnapp's distinction, Marinetti's pilot retains "authorship" of his speed, while the jet-man does not. This difference reflects postmodernism's suspicion about an individual's "authorship" of their own subjectivity. What inheres in both representations of speed is the sense of the pilot not only as "other," but as a figure endowed with god-like or sacred characteristics. Both celebrate their respective pilots as being dehumanised by their experience, and this isolation from humanity is caused in part by their "master[y] of Time and Space" (Marinetti "Religion-Morality" 94). As Marinetti's pilot conquers time and space, as Barthes's pilot "overtak[es] motion" and "go[es] faster than speed" (*Mythologies* 71), and as Willy is forever vanishing like tail lights in the distance, they transcend the human, entering a world outside history.

(iv) "Mak[ing] symbols of epochal stuff"

Davis, letter to Dawe and Calder.

Willy's relationship with history is a complicated one, and it is useful to consider again the difference between the "history" of Davis and that of Jameson. What Davis would identify as his own "historical consciousness" — his recognition of the recession of past events and old technologies into

history — Jameson would see as an attempt to satisfy postmodern culture's "craving for historicity" ("Interview" 19). Jameson objects to the reduction of history to "images" because of the attendant emptying out of its ideological meaning. For Davis however the meaning of historical information emerges as it is converted into images of history, thus "altering its signals" ("Note"). Clearly these positions are very different, and Jameson would consider Davis's "historical consciousness" to be a false one. Because of these opposing views of history one can identify in the *Gazette* some of Jameson's symptoms of a loss of history, but Davis employs these effects in a knowing (and almost gleeful) way. He recognises that his use of history as a series of "symbols" empties out their ideological content, and he foregrounds this by making his images apparently arbitrary. Davis valorises this treatment of history because his theoretical position distrusts claims like Jameson's about the significance of history as a source of ideology.

The process of collecting politically charged "fashion-plate images" from history described by Jameson is evident in Davis's work, particularly in the *Gazette*. A prominent example is the poem about the 1981 Springbok tour protests, which documents Willy's

... "VERY FIRST POLITICAL FEELING"

(serious!) uh/ and now

all those jog trotter policemen and you jammed

up crowded there and the bloodiness and shame SHAME!

while the debate goes on and goes on in the Chamber

and misses every conceivable point and the rude rude

rugby understanding with his big beautiful

earnest pink head knows it and hears it

and can ignore that THIS IS HISTORY AND THERE ARE BIG

PATTERNS HERE shit.. yup that hooker is 140kgs and eats

lots and lots of meat.. Fuck fuck Ben Couch and Botha! (21)

This poem inserts Willy into the images of a massively significant political moment in New Zealand history. Its representation of the period is a series of scenes: the protests themselves are described ("all those jog trotter policemen and you jammed / up crowded there and the bloodiness"), the anti-tour slogan is recalled ("shame SHAME!"), and the Prime Minister Muldoon is described ("with his big beautiful / earnest pink head"). While this poem is apparently "historical" however, it is significant that it merely reproduces the *images* of the tour protests. The images are clearly recognisable, and they draw on liberal expressions of contempt for rugby culture, but they do not display any obvious connection to the anti-apartheid campaign from which they grew. The purpose of the poem is to employ the currency of these images, thereby locating Willy in a specific moment in time, a moment of symbolic significance.

During the writing of the tour poem Davis reflected in a letter to Andrea Dawe and Alex Calder on the symbolic nature of historical representation. He describes the issues related to the tour protests as "so far-reaching...symbolic is the word," and comments on the way in which these issues draw together a diverse constituency. Discussing Willy ("willis") "who has moral convictions like mercury," Davis notes that he is "becoming political" and states that politics is "quite the most dangerous kind of information to have in poems." It is perhaps because "political" information is, for Davis, so potentially "dangerous" that he inserts that "(serious!)" after identifying Willy's first "POLITICAL FEELING" — the exclamation mark makes the "seriousness" facetious, and thus disarms the "danger" of that feeling. In relation to Willy's emergence as a "political" figure, Davis writes:

even if I cant bring it off I think the trick is to realize the fact that this stuff is designed to date as the issue does, and so make the poem OCCASIONAL and eccentric ie interesting, and so pre-

empt this dating or show that you know about it and so bring it into the field of the thing ie watch this issue in terms of its half-life, as historical (Willy's biggest word). (Letter to Dawe and Calder)

Davis comments that his position is informed by his reading of Robert Lowell. In Davis's view, the "events and the persons" in Lowell's work are "significant as men of the culture or as late sixties allegories," and are "patterned by the things of the period." Lowell "makes history a big word," and "makes symbols of epochal stuff" (Letter to Dawe and Calder), and these practices have clearly influenced Davis's own approach to representations of history. Willy is thoroughly "patterned by the things of the period," and the tour poem is an example of how Davis himself "makes symbols of epochal stuff."

It is important to recognise that Davis's "symbols" are not symbols in the traditional sense of tropes which convey a wealth of condensed or compacted meaning. Rather they are images which indicate the poems' (and Davis's) awareness of particular periods, events or people without admitting to their significance as anything other than signifiers of *themselves*, or of *history*, their only meaning being a result of their new context. Like the photographed subject in Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, these references are converted into "Total Images" (14).¹² Where Barthes's photo makes him

¹² It is interesting to consider, in relation to this, Davis's comments about his appropriation of Te Kooti in "Station of Earthbound Ghosts" and *Te Tangi a te Matuhi*. He characterises his use of symbolism from Maori culture as being about generating new meaning, rather than appealing to its historical significance, and thus such appropriation (in his eyes) is not problematic: "It's not you a Maori, me European — that's bicultural. It's the third term, it's the inflected difference . . . something new emerges." He goes on to state that this is why he "can talk about Princess Diana in the same way [he] can talk about Te Kooti." He did not feel that he was "treading on sacred ground" with *Te Tangi a te Matuhi* because

it was much more transformative, everything's in a big new washing machine, and so it's much more focused on the third term than the cultural tradition that Maori represents and my greater or lesser ability to read it. I was not worried about that, it was the interaction of those two to produce a third. Interview with the author 176.

into "Death in person," Davis's text makes his signifiers into "*History* in person." Paraphrasing Barthes's description of this process, we can say that *Willy's Gazette* turns its events "ferociously, into . . . object[s]," putting them "at [its] mercy, at [its] disposal, classified in a file, ready for the subtlest deceptions" (14).

Davis's awareness of how the appropriation of historical images turns them "ferociously . . . into object[s]" is apparent when we consider how he characterises Willy's relationship with these images. Willy, who "construct[s] / [his] symbols well" from numerous sources, associates himself with the revolutionary cause of the Nicaraguan "Sandanista" [sic] movement, but significantly he does this with only "half his heart" (4). Here Davis represents Willy adopting a political cause in an ambivalent, noncommittal way, a symptom, perhaps, of his "mercur[ial]" moral convictions (Letter). Another instance of note describes Willy's style of dress, reducing a revolutionary leader to a style leader: "..beret (noir) mimes Guevara and radical chic" (19). It is interesting to consider, given these examples and also the tour poem, what Davis meant when he announced that Willy was "becoming political." The *Gazette* is peppered with references which could be labelled political, but these operate in the text purely as images. The poems are not what one would term "political" in a conventional sense, unless, of course, one is referring to *literary* politics. This is made clear in the *Gazette* as fashion and politics coalesce: "these are / the currents the summer's political gestures" (47). Willy "mimes" the "radical chic" of Guevara, rather than addressing his politics or his historical significance (in Jameson's sense), indicating that Guevara-the-man has become "Guevara"-the-image — here "Guevara" is a signifier of "radical chic." The Sandinistas and Guevara are at Willy's "disposal" as images, and they are "ready for the subtlest deception" (Barthes *Camera Lucida* 14), as they are appropriated without "moral conviction."

The references above demonstrate Davis's awareness of the way in which the past is cannibalised, often randomly, for the purposes of fashion and image creation. Willy is "covered with information" in the form of clothing that recalls various historical figures: "(claret blazer hints at / Coleridge and Grasmere et pantalons verts)" (19), but this "information" is neither coherent nor meaningful. As has been discussed, Willy "gathers large his diction" (71) with images from innumerable sources, and this diffuseness serves, in a sense, to *defuse* those images. The abundance of signifiers is so great that the text resists the reader's attempts to attach significance to these images other than *as images*. Thus one can see a parallel between the way these examples function in Davis's work and the simulacra that repress historical consciousness in Jameson's analysis. However there is not a straightforward connection here, and the complicating factor is Davis's knowingness, his awareness of how his own use of history "makes symbols of epochal stuff." Davis draws attention to the way in which the connection between these images and their origin has been clouded or dissolved. He is not operating in the same way as Klein's Prada collection (84)¹³ — which can be read as a politically interested subversion of class conflict — but rather he is foregrounding that practice in a manner which encourages us to interrogate it, and to examine the nature of reference in the poems.

As has been noted Davis's references to recent events and cultural figures are intended to indicate the *Gazette's* temporal location — one can identify (in addition to the Springbok tour) Ian Wedde's 1982 *Listener* article "Frank's Secret Army" (59), Graham Parker (19), David Byrne and Laurie Anderson (59), and the death of Barthes in 1980 (91). This foregrounding of the *Gazette's* moment was intended to "pre-empt" the "dating" of the poems, showing that Davis "kn[e]w about it," and emphasising the *Gazette's* "half-life, as historical" (Letter to Dawe and Calder). This further evidences that Davis's understanding of history is about how textual/symbolic meaning

¹³ See my 18-19.

accrues over time, "altering [the] signals" of a "cultural product" ("Note"). The *Gazette* will become "historical" as these contemporary references date — he intends its "half-life" to be short: the text will break down, as the connections between these references and their significance do, and its emissions will change. The rapidity with which the *Gazette* dates functions to distance it from the reader, as it increases the futility of trying to attach significance to its information. It is also interesting to consider, however, Davis's comment that he can "pre-empt this dating." He suggests that by making the poem "OCCASIONAL," by showing that he recognises how quickly material dates, he is able to annex this process of "dating" and use it to place his text outside (what Jameson would call) history. Like the jet-man, if Davis can go fast enough, he'll get beyond time and history.

In relation to this, Sharp's observation that *Willy's Gazette* is "fashion-conscious, social, transient, bearing a prominent datestamp," and his likening of it to *Vogue*, is interesting. Sharp suggests that the ephemerality of both Willy and his *Gazette* forms an integral part of Davis's "attack" on the conventions of New Zealand poetry. Sharp contends that while the preoccupations of most New Zealand poets (at least up until 1985) were essentially modernist, Davis's project represents a major break with this tradition. While most poetry aims at "distilling an intemporal essence," and finding itself a permanent place on the shelves, *Willy's Gazette* deliberately undermines these ideals through content, form and presentation. Sharp declares that *Willy's Gazette* is not intended to be "immortal poesy" (Rev. of WG 383).

The *Gazette* certainly presents itself as "fashion-conscious," as indicated by the references to avant-garde musicians and clothes designers, and the fixation with Willy's garb. Willy is a dandy, a "dedicated follower of fashion," and his constant costume changes are part of the process of reinvention which means he is always slipping away from the reader — his

costumes are disguises: as he "mimes" Guevara he is *dissembling*. He wears so many different outfits in the *Gazette* that it is impossible to keep up with him, and this replicates the "ever more rapid rhythm of fashion and styling changes" Jameson sees as a defining characteristic of postmodern culture ("Postmodernism" 124). Willy is not only represented as a consumer of fashion, but also as a designer, through an analogy between magazine editing and clothes design: "so what does he do with his material, / edit it, as trousers' basque cut" (48). This connection casts Willy as an author of fashion, a role in which, by definition, he is not merely up with the play, but ahead of it.

Davis wanted the *Gazette* to combine the current events focus of Reuters with the "class publishing" of Condé Nast ("Note"), a publishing house responsible for such lavish lifestyle and fashion magazines as *Vogue* and *Condé Nast Traveller*. Both Reuters and Condé Nast appeal to Davis because of the way they are "timeful" ("Note"), as news and fashion both rapidly become old (hat). There is an apparent discrepancy between the desire to emulate Condé Nast's glossy, expensive magazines and the thrifty delivery of the original *Gazette*. However the notion of "class publishing" for Davis appears to refer to the slickness with which a publication is tailored to its demographic. Where the beautiful photography and exquisite design of Condé Nast's magazines are designed to stimulate the consumption fetish of the bourgeoisie, Davis's publications appeal to the aesthetic sense of a community which sees itself as resistant to bourgeois culture.

While *And* and the *Gazette* do represent genuine resistance to various habits of New Zealand literature and literary criticism, it is significant that the oppositional pose of these projects is — to draw on Jameson's analysis — a powerful marketing tool in postmodern culture ("Postmodernism" 124). As we have seen in Barthes's *Mythologies*, the opposition to bourgeois culture posed by the avant-garde is aesthetic, rather than political, and this offers an

explanation for this discrepancy. Both *And* and the original *Gazette* are radically different from magazines such as *Vogue* in terms of their presentation, demonstrating an aesthetic resistance to the bourgeoisie. However Davis's projects share with Condé Nast publications an obsession with the opposition between the new and the outdated, and with the rapidity with which the former recedes into the latter. Moreover, both assume a position of being predictive (if not constructive) of fashion (textile or textual). The ventures of both Condé Nast and Davis are, to borrow a phrase from Davis's review of Wedde, "market aware," and to be market aware is to be part of bourgeois ideology.

(v) Back in fashion: Willy rides again

If the avant-gardism of *Willy's Gazette* is dependent in part on the style of its original production, with its implied impermanence, what are the implications of the 1999 reissue? The text is unchanged with two exceptions — the addition to the "Note" of a quote from the poem ("These, (W), reliquaries like mobile toys"), and the alteration of the dedication (in the original "For Susan," in the 1999 version "For Susan (1983, 1999) / For Roger Horrocks, national treasure"). While these changes are slight, the production of the poem has shifted markedly, from a low-budget manifesto of Davis's views on poetry in 1983, to an up-market celebration of "one of NZs outstanding and innovative poems of the past quarter century" (Geraets). This dramatic change is, I consider, more than "a signifier to the rise of computers" (Brown 164).

This second outing for *Willy's Gazette* is produced as issue 12 of *A Brief Description of the Whole World*, complete with an editorial from John Geraets, but its status as a issue of the magazine is complicated by a number of factors. *A Brief Description of the Whole World* generally appears in a format

similar to that of *And* and the original *Gazette* — A4, cheaply produced. Issue 12 however is a slick A5 volume, complete with a white, semi-transparent dust-jacket bearing the details “*A Brief Description of the Whole World*, Editor: John Geraets. Number 12, June 1999.” Through this flimsy jacket one can see the real cover of the *Gazette*, strikingly similar in design to the original, complete with the Jack Books logo on the front and back (the return of the repressed?). While there is an editorial from Geraets, and the details of The Writers’ Group are given where one would expect to find the publisher’s information, the first two pages beyond this editorial identify Jack Books (Davis’s own enterprise) as the publisher. Where the actual impulse for the reproduction is located is unclear. It is as if the poem is disguised as an issue of the magazine, but in a semi-transparent way.

While both editions of *Willy’s Gazette* have presented themselves as magazines, the way in which this presentation is carried out in each case is significant. The format of the original implied its relationship to a magazine, while the 1999 edition is a book which has unconvincingly *labelled* itself as a journal. In both instances Davis disappears, relinquishing the authorship of his own text to his “editor.” In 1983 this editor is Willy, but by 1999 Willy’s editorship is further mediated by that of Geraets. Notably though, Geraets’s editorship is purely nominal — as we have seen, the text has not changed. This nominal editorship is announced on the dust-jacket — again this does not conform with the usual production of *Brief Description* — giving it a degree of significance which appears unjustified. This serves to make Davis even more distant from the reader, as he is concealed not only by Willy, but by the dust-jacket (and Geraets). Furthermore, the implication that it is Geraets and The Writers Group who have sought to “deliver again” the *Gazette* shields Davis from criticism about how the reissue conflicts with his own statements about the nature of the project as “timeful” and transient.

Both Geraets and Davis, in their respective prefaces to the poem, discuss the

idea of texts as historical. Davis asserted in 1983 that he was "interested in institutions, and also in a sense of recession, in how a cultural product becomes historical, altering its signals" ("Note"), a sentiment one recognises throughout his work as he seeks to historicise New Zealand's realist literary tradition (as embodied by Curnow), and as he militates against the notion of "immortal poesy." Davis's understanding of how history acts on a text — making it remote, and reducing its signification to its "symbolic" position as "historical" — does not sit easily alongside the suggestion made by Geraets that "[t]o appear in a different time and a difference [sic] place is more than just to reappear: it is to *happen* again, fresh and self-brightening." In the early '80s Davis professed that the *Gazette's* "half-life, as historical" was what made it interesting (Letter to Dawe and Calder), but for Geraets the text is "fresh" sixteen years after its publication — it hasn't decomposed. Willy has somehow "happen[ed]" all over again (He lives!). This notion of "happen[ing] again" is a problematic one — does Geraets mean to imply that every time a text appears in a new edition it starts a new life? Would a reissue of a volume of Curnow's poetry, for example, "*happen* again, fresh and self-brightening"? Probably not, but there is no justification given by Geraets for why Davis's work might be accorded this happy knack for resurrection.

While clearly both Geraets and Davis recognise that the text "signals" differently in a new context, it appears that Davis's work is mysteriously privileged with a kind of immortality. Instead of the *Gazette* being a momentary, fleeting incursion on the landscape of New Zealand poetry it has taken its place as part of the institution. Davis's "historical consciousness" centres on the notion of recession, and yet his own text (it seems) refuses to recede. Perhaps, though, this is because Davis "pre-empt[ed]" the dating of his text by "pre-empt[ing]" the material of its significance. As we have seen, the use of references which are emptied of their meaning is part of a process by which Davis ensures that to read *Willy's Gazette* is always in a sense to *mis-read* it. By representing history as a series

of images, Davis empties them of their content, making their signification merely illusory. We can only mis-read the *Gazette* because the proliferation of empty references means that to attach significance to any of them, to privilege the jet-man, say, or Futurism, is to miss the point. It is this slipperiness of the text that makes it difficult to pin down, just as Willy himself is always out of reach. Perhaps then, the significance of the reissue is that it signals that *Willy's Gazette* wants to resist being pinned down by history. We can recall a sonnet cited earlier:

... And you have only to stop
and read and latent
Willy after several years will a-
muse, as the archaic French
has it, vivid & (avant) will advance
another unhesitant ready
step, whenever you go that way. (72)

After sixteen years Willy is still "vivid" and out in front. He will always be ready to take another step forward, and in this he betrays his desire to be timeless.

CONCLUSION

"It is my *political* right to be a subject which I must protect."

Barthes *Camera Lucida* 15.

Reflecting on the way in which photography converts him from a subject to an object (or "Total-Image"), Barthes observes that in "private life" one must defend one's political subjectivity (14-15). Given the prominence accorded to Davis's determination to destabilise the subject position of Willy in my discussion of the *Gazette*, it is appropriate to consider the effects of such shiftiness in the realm of practical politics. This is highly pertinent to the issue at the heart of this thesis, as poststructuralism's renunciation of the subject has important political consequences. Barthes's statement also reinforces the partiality of my own position. The exercise of *my* "political right to be a subject" is evident in the subjectivity (in its more colloquial sense) of my discussion.

In order to draw this investigation to a close, it is necessary to reiterate the connections between the comments of Said, Ross and Jameson, and Davis's projects during the early '80s.

Returning to Said, we recall his contention that the political pertinence of theory is inhibited by the "cult of expertise and professionalism" and the "doctrine of non-interference between fields" (136). He suggests that literary critics (for example) do not engage with texts that fall outside the field in which they are experts. They do not apply their critical practice to texts which are the preserve of other "experts" (such as documents of government policy) (146). This strict specialisation of academic disciplines has, he suggests, resulted in a culture where academics in a given field "speak only to and for each other" (143), thus excluding those without "professional . . . accreditation" in that field (140). This

is exacerbated by the use of theory in critical writing as a "discourse of occultation and legitimation" (155-56).

Davis's critical writing employs discourses of "occultation and legitimation," as the *And* project seeks to defamiliarise local literature through the application of poststructural theory. The use of theoretical jargon, and the dropping of names such as "Barthes" and "Lacan," serve to alienate the reader who is uninitiated (*inexpert*) in matters of theory, and to legitimise his project through an appeal to the (continental) authorities. *Willy's Gazette* employs similar tactics, in effect creating a text which is recalcitrantly *mis*-readable, pushing toward *unreadable*.¹ This process of "occultation and legitimation" is also identifiable in the discussion of education policy in *Economic Management*, although it operates in a different way. Where Davis's critical writing uses complex, theorised language to estrange the reader, *Economic Management* deploys the rhetoric of common sense in order to conceal the radical ideological shift it represents. Said's notion of "interference" is problematic in relation to Davis, who transgresses the boundary between the fields of literature and economics. He transfers the rhetorical strategies of each area to the other, using market jargon in his criticism and poetry, and employing poststructuralism's "politics of appropriation" (Ross ix) in his Treasury work. However, this transgression is not really what Said envisages as "interference," which is conceived as a means of opening up specialist discourses. In Davis's case, the blurring of the boundary between the literary and the economic increases the potential of his discourse to mystify and exclude.

This brings us to Ross, who argues that the democratising potential of poststructuralism is undermined by the "elitist" nature of the discourse (ix-x).

¹ Cf. Davis, interview with the author, where he states that his writing is "transparent on the edge of opaque, it's readable on the edge of unreadable." 194.

He suggests that poststructuralism has failed to live up to the "radical credentials" it earned through its critique of the authority of the centre, as the utility of that critique is only available to the "privileged" (ix). In particular, he identifies the rejection of "essentialist notion[s] of political identity" as being problematic for groups on the social margins, as the discourse of these groups often depends on such notions in order to expropriate power from the socio-political centre. "Moments of 'identity,'" he states, "are historically effective (they are the result of a shared material and discursive history)" (xi-xii).

Davis's work appeals to those who are conversant with theory, while deliberately resisting those who are not. His work is not geared towards democratising the literary culture, but towards effecting a change within that culture (which is traditionally dominated by the educated classes). Davis might be militating against what he terms the "bourgeois epistemology" of prominent poets such as Wedde and Curnow ("Set Up" 3; "Solo Curnow" 50), but this attack on their aesthetic authority is a "new kind of assimilation or collaboration" (Ross xi), as it is carried out from within the bourgeoisie. Davis employs poststructuralism as a means of opposing the "centre," but his opposition is to the aesthetic centre, rather than the political centre. The limited nature of this critique recalls Barthes's analysis of the avant-garde, which suggests that because the avant-garde emerges from the bourgeoisie, it is able to contest its aesthetics but not its power (*Mythologies* 139-40). Davis's theoretical agenda, which is conspicuously figured as avant-garde, is "radical" only in its engagement with *literary* politics, a discursive site to which only the materially privileged have access.

The social implications of the abandonment of "essentialist notion[s] of political identity," described by Ross, are particularly interesting in relation to the question of whether or not poststructuralism enables New Right discourse. As

has been briefly discussed in chapter one, the political philosophy of the New Right privileges the market as a creator and distributor of wealth, and rejects interventionist policies that seek "artificially" to redress socio-economic inequalities. Such interventionism is usually predicated on the recognition of the "universal" disadvantage of a particular social group, and thus it relies on what could be termed an "essentialist" notion of that group's political identity.

Ross's assertion that "moments of 'identity'" are "the result of a shared material or discursive history" is particularly important here. Implicit in this is the connection between the rejection of essentialist understandings of identity and the rejection of historical metanarratives. As Fraser and Nicholson note, poststructuralism seeks to delegitimise both "large-scale historical narratives and social-theoretical analyses of pervasive relations of dominance and subordination" (90). What I wish to draw attention to is the fact that "pervasive relations of dominance and subordination" are only recognisable in the context of "large-scale historical narratives." "Essentialist" notions of identity *depend upon* the recognition of historical narratives. Considering the way in which this parallels the neoliberal attitude towards government intervention, one can note that the New Right rejects the claims of marginalised groups about their institutional and historical disadvantage. Such claims are viewed as illegitimate because they presuppose that a shared history can lead to a shared present, an understanding which conflicts with both the New Right's doctrine of individual responsibility and poststructuralism's "universal abandon."

Thus we can see that history is, in a sense, a problem for the New Right, because it complicates the neoliberal claim that, in a market-driven society, wealth and power are available to anyone who works to attain them. Neoliberalism cannot admit that systematic, historical exclusion from power continues to materially effect the social and economic situation of the individual.

Therefore, the fact that poststructuralism repudiates historical narrative and, as we have seen in Davis's work, re-appropriates history as a collection of depoliticised images, makes it a theoretical position which can reinforce neoliberal power.

And so we are led back to Jameson's discussion of the loss of history which, in his view, plagues postmodern culture. His contention that time is "fragment[ed] . . . into a series of perpetual presents" by the accelerated, media-saturated culture of postmodernism ("Postmodernism" 124), has an obvious bearing upon Davis's use of historical signifiers, particularly in the *Gazette*. I have proposed a fundamental difference between what "history" means for Jameson and what it means for Davis. This difference, explained in chapter three, can be reduced to the observation that a sense of *progression* inheres in Jameson's "history," while a sense of *recession* inheres in Davis's. Jameson subscribes to the kind of "anecdotal, time-honoured, the past will write the future" discourse which, Davis states, both *And* and *Economic Management* sought to break away from (Interview with the author 185). Jameson's sense of history as the author of the future is explicitly rejected by Davis, who defines his own project in opposition to history. He reduces the past to a series of historical images, which function primarily to signify their own status as *historical* — he is interested in their "pastness" (to borrow from Eliot). In this way he acknowledges his precursors while simultaneously distancing himself from them. Like the jet-man's relation to aviation history (as both part of its development and as a member of a "new race in aviation" [*Mythologies* 71]), Davis is both continuous with and alien to New Zealand's literary culture. This alienation is effected both through revolutionary new technology and through the speed with which cultural products vanish into the past. In terms of Jameson's (Marxist) analysis, Davis's celebration of the culture of rapid obsolescence, and his treatment of history as a source of images, correspond

with the notion that "the future [begins] with the ruination of history" (Bracewell 8).

The relationship between history and speed in Davis's work is crucial. Davis's sense of time and history privileges the notion of transience and obsolescence, processes which become more rapid as cultural change accelerates. He has described his sense of time as "Heraclitean" (Interview with the author 174), emphasising the idea of constant flux, and the consequent irretrievability of the past.² A further important link between history and speed can be seen when one considers the "dehumanised" nature of both the Futurist pilot and Barthes's jet-man. Both these figures are "dehumanised" through their experience of speed — speed causes rupture, as their sense of time and their subjectivity are radically dissociated from what one might term "human" experience. They relinquish their "humanism," their subjectivity and their identity, as they move beyond time and history. This can be related back to the connection between the rejection of historical metanarratives and the repudiation of notions of "essentialist" identity, as it is through their evasion of history that these figures become affectless.

The obliteration of "humanism" caused by speed is suggestive when one recalls the strategic application of speed in the project of neoliberal reform. Roger Douglas argues that speed is an essential "principle" of reform, and this principle informs both the economic restructuring of the '80s and Davis's literary projects. A rapidly implemented reform programme is, Douglas notes, harder to critique, and its "momentum" makes it harder to stop (222-25),³ and

² It is interesting, in light of this "Heraclitean" sense of history, to consider again Geraets's assertion that "to appear in a different time . . . is to *happen* again." You can't step into the same river twice — unless, it appears, you're Willy. He also appeals to the Heraclitean sense of time in his interview with Alan Loney 54.

³ The impulse to restrict public debate inherent in such a principle is seen by some on the left as "highly undemocratic." Kelsey 34.

this tactical advantage of speed is employed in Davis's ambush of New Zealand's literary culture.

In theoretical terms, the acceleration of cultural change can be seen as a phenomenon that alters our relationship with the past, disconnecting us from the historical narratives which construct a sense of communal ("universal") identity. It "dehumanises" us; as we see in Willy, the rapidity of shifts in cultural fashion destabilises the subject position, ultimately causing that subjectivity to dissolve entirely. This disappearance of the subject has material political implications, and in light of these it is important to note the differences between the operation of the death of the subject in the spheres of politics and poetics. Politically, it undermines social collectivity, and reduces the political subject to an object, thereby diminishing its agency.⁴ In literature, by contrast, it is understood as a form of liberation, as text is cut loose from author(ity).

As they reach toward this liberation, Davis's texts resist analysis. We have seen that his celebration of speed and obsolescence, and his deployment of signifiers which don't necessarily *signify*, complicate the process of reading. *And* and the *Gazette* are both positioned as fleeting incursions on the literary scene. Because of their self-conscious transience they resist critique, as they acknowledge that

⁴To illustrate this I wish to suggest a rather contentious analogy between Davis's treatment of history and the political behaviour of the post-1984 government. As has been noted, Davis reduces the past to representations of the past, thereby emptying them of their political significance. One could compare this with the way in which some policies of the New Right have the effect of reducing people to economic or statistical representations of people, emptying them of their *human* significance. The manipulation of the unemployment rate in order to reduce wages, and thus control inflation, is an example of this practice (Barry *Land of Plenty*). The implementation of such policies is justified through the "dehumanising" of political subjects, as they are reduced to a statistic which *represents* the unemployed. The moral or ethical problems one might identify with a strategy which (in the tradition of utilitarianism) ruthlessly disempowers the few for the perceived good of the majority are not considered, as the humanism (the subjectivity) of that disempowered few is effaced. It should be noted that in drawing this comparison I do not wish to imply that Davis himself is interested in dehumanising people for political ends. What I want to draw attention to is that the disappearance of the subject in poststructural discourse has political significance when applied to public policy.

their moment has passed as soon as they appear. The acceleration of cultural change contributes to the destabilisation of subject positions, and this is replicated in Davis's projects, as they refuse to be pinned down. Willy, who moves through his *Gazette* at the speed of light, exemplifies this trend, as he is impossible to catch — he's always one step ahead of the reader, disappearing on the text's horizon. The evanescence of Willy is paralleled by Davis's own position, as the constant reinvention of his project, and his awareness of the recession of his work into history make him difficult to read.

His double-consciousness (as both critic and practitioner of literature) infuses his work with a self-awareness which compounds the texts' resistance. It makes it difficult to decipher Davis's tone, as his heroics are simultaneously *mock*-heroics, and his attack on the practices of New Zealand literature, while serious in impulse, is announced with self-ironic militancy. His work shifts between seriousness, parody, and pastiche (confounding Jameson's assertion that postmodernism has occasioned the death of parody, replacing it with pastiche ["Postmodernism" 113]), and thus one can't always work out what to attach significance to. To employ a suitably speed-centred metaphor, he can run with the hare and hunt with the hounds.

This issue of tone returns us to the notion of dandyism, and the implications of Davis's positioning of himself as a dandy. The dandy, as we have seen in Barthes, "has no philosophy other than a transitory one: a life interest" and, for the dandy, "time is the time of [his/her] life" (*Roland Barthes* 106). Thus Barthes's dandy is a figure without political or (in Marxist terms) historical consciousness. Dandyism is an "individualist position," as this disconnection from "philosophy" and "time" also disconnects the dandy from social (shared) experience. One can correlate this understanding of the dandy with Jameson's schizophrenic, whose experience of both time and language is one of

discontinuity and incoherence ("Postmodernism" 119). Barthes's suggestion that dandyism is the position assumed by the "intellectual classes" when they choose not to be "militant" can also be associated with Said's criticism of the doctrine of "*noninterference*" among academics (155). Adopting a dandyish pose can be read as the most extreme form of this noninterference, as it represents a self-conscious evasion of questions of political praxis.

Davis's work exhibits the failure to engage with "the politics of struggle and power in the everyday world" (Said 147) evident in both Barthes's dandy and his avant-garde (*Roland Barthes* 106; *Mythologies* 139). Despite his professional involvement with these politics (in *Treasury*), his literary work is determinedly and exclusively aesthetic. His appropriation of the stance of the dandy functions to justify a position of political disinterest. In this way, Davis pre-empts criticism on the grounds that (in his capacity as a writer) he remains politically uninvolved, as the dandy's concern is solely aesthetic, and hence apolitical. Davis celebrates speed and dandyism as methods of vacating the subject position and, crucially, they efface his position as a *political* subject. The problem that remains however, is that appropriating an apolitical position is always intractably political.

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APPENDIX

Interview with Leigh Davis

Transcript of an interview conducted by Emma Fergusson, at the Fay Richwhite Building, Queen Street, Auckland, 30 Aug. 1999, 2pm.

Emma Fergusson: I'd like to start with a question about the now notorious comparison made in your article "Solo Curnow" between Curnow and a 1957 Chrysler. I am interested in the idea that once the particular moment of a literary style or discourse has passed, the value of that work becomes essentially historical. I wonder if you would now apply a similar strategy to a reading of the *And* project itself. Do you view the work which *And* was doing in the early 1980s as quaint now?

Leigh Davis: *Well, when was this, 81 through to 84 — was the last issue in 84?*

EF: 1982 until 1985, October 85 was the last issue...

LD: *So we're talking fifteen years ago, plus or minus... so you'd do things differently if you were doing it again, so I guess that points to quaintness. But quaint is a pejorative, and I don't regard And as deserving of that term. As I recall... it seems odd now that the drift of literature studies, in English anyway, at the time that Alex and I were doing it, was taking place in an ideal space, that quality was something that had some ideal characteristics — and I mean ideal in the sense of timeless, so 'this is a timeless work' was a typical sort of comment. And yet it was equally clear that literature took place at a point in time. So And was trying to be aware of that location, and be argumentative in a kind of twenty-something way. And it very much evolved out of... well if you think back to when*

Alex and I were at school in the late 70s, and then we moved through to our separate research interests — I did the work on Allen Curnow and he was doing work on John Berryman.

Just to pick up the Curnow momentarily, the thing that really excited me about Allen Curnow — and it's only possible with someone whose product is as defined as his is, someone who is robust, and Curnow is clearly one of the most robust — he was very much still in a realism or post-realism frame. The occasion for his writing was typically "how do I match this language to that experience?" and look at the gap between — that's the classic occasion, or at least it was the classic occasion for Curnow's writing at that time, and had remained so since the early thirties. So that's all realism, plus or minus: "how do I match this language to that experience?" — on the assumption that the experience predates the poetic treatment of it. So that binary opposition — language and experience — was thoroughly worked through but he was unwilling to think at that stage, or unwilling to bring — or perhaps I just didn't see it — to bring an awareness of that language and what it was he was doing, and almost to obliterate "the subject." So And was an extension of trying to get outside a realist frame and find other places where meaning lies.

EF: So was it a local movement which brought about *And*, in your opinion?

LD: No no no no. We were doing a lot of reading. The reading focus had switched from an Anglo-American tradition to a French tradition, and there was all the exuberance and disproportionate attention which goes with something really new. So from one side of the Atlantic to the other, the people that we were reading had switched. So we were trying to take a conceptual framework and put it to work in a local context. So those two things — stuff that we were reading about and how could it make the reading of New Zealand literature yield more

information. Create new models too.

An interesting thing I'm reading at the moment, I'm going back and reading Eliot's metaphysical lectures that he gave in the mid twenties, and Eliot is obviously so suggestive, but he was doing exactly the same thing really — that is understanding not at the level of who wrote well, the level of opinion and taste but at the level of theory, ie. what systematic observations can be made? And so here's the whole thing behind what content can I give to the term metaphysical in a 1920s context, and Eliot was "how do I anatomise a literary tradition to extract from it a tool kit for how I want to write?" And "how can I make systematic observations rather than taste observations?" So people have been trying to do this with literature for quite a while — And was just a little five-cent contribution to that broad theme. It struck us at the time that the word theory was such a noisy word — it got people really worried, more worried than it should, and that was part of it, pushing at that boundary as well.

EF: Do you think that the moment the of specific model of poststructuralism that one can read in *And* has passed now?

LD: *Oh I think so. Yeah I think that it was part of beginning to look at other places where meaning lay, other than the accurately observed experience. So it was part of language becoming an object of attention.*

EF: So the work has been developed and expanded rather than replaced?

LD: *Yeah, well there's Cultural Studies. I remember reading a very influential book, perhaps the most influential at the time, which is probably a case in point: Raymond Williams's Marxism and Literature. A spectacular book. And he tries to fit literature to history, and he invents some points, suggested ways that that could be done. Now to my knowledge no one else is quite so influenced by*

that book as I was. Immediately Raymond Williams has kind of been taken up as a late seventies cultural theory guy, a little bit aligned left of centre with John Berger — these are the figures from that period — and the game has moved on a lot, but it doesn't obsolesce them. The '57 Chrysler metaphor is actually not ironic about the '57 Chrysler. It's a kind of loving affection. It's not saying "this is precursor technology, look how bad it was," no, it's evolutionary technology — you need to look at where it was. Curnow himself has sped on past that, and he was probably way past it at the time but...

EF: Following *And*, also preceding it of course, but notably post-*And* there was a proliferation of little magazines, coming out of lots of different spheres and disciplines — architecture, art theory and so on, which seem to sort of draw on and contribute to some of the same debates. Do you think that has persisted to the present time?

LD: *Oh yeah, little magazines are always with us, and it's a variation of 'fanzine', isn't it? It's a variation of a chat site in an email framework. People have common interests, they can't always share those interests or develop those interests by meeting in the same café, so the little magazine is a way of doing that. It's a variation of the kindergarten newsletter, the church newsletter, you know, they're immemorial.*

EF: So are there journals or little magazines at the moment which function as a place for theoretically informed discussion about New Zealand literature and culture?

LD: *Yeah, there's The Pander, it's the same type. What happens is that the production values vary, but there are always niche opinions. I think that the common theme is dominant brand-names breaking down and giving way to communities of interest. For example — this may seem a little curious — but*

The New Zealand Herald for example for a long period of time didn't cater to the youth market, and so you had people who wanted to cater to the youth market — and this was a business motivation not an ideas motivation — setting up magazines like *The World*. And at the time that we did *And* — and it was by no means the first of the tradition, it was just another one — you have had organisations like *Islands* or *Landfall* as the literary periodicals trying to represent a culture as a whole, and being positioned that way because of their reliance on public funding.

So there was an economic imperative — they were going for three or four thousand circulation, and they needed to justify their existence to funding bodies. And so that, plus just the tradition they inherited, meant that they were covering lowest common denominator material. They had to be monolithic in their character and *And*, with our circulation of one or two hundred didn't have to be. *And*'s breakthrough was recognising that it was temporary, and bringing a little bit of marketing style to it, and gathering a group of people — partly because we recognised that we were temporary — who could be of the moment and then let something else come along.

EF: It strikes me that the *And* project would lend itself quite well to a Cultural Studies kind of analysis, looking at those factors surrounding its production, as well as how it was received. I wonder, do you have a particular opinion about the move towards Cultural Studies?

LD: Well I probably don't know a lot about it, but I'm a relatively engaged consumer of... well, meaningful things, and so as a reader — I mean you can see this in *Willy's Gazette* — what's in the frame to look at any particular time are the ways in which the culture makes people up, rather than the other way around. I like the little aphorism "First we make our tools, thereafter they make us." It's the second part that I like.

EF: So are you still interested in the theoretical debates emerging in New Zealand and abroad at the moment?

LD: *Interested, but I'm not reading much. I'm respectful — I understand the validity of that kind of knowledge — but not current.*

EF: Well I suppose it would be rather time consuming to try and keep current with it when you are doing other work...

LD: *Well you see what happens — I mean it's about your view of education too. I think education is what you have left when you've forgotten what you learned.*

EF: I'd like to ask you a bit about your more recent work. I was lucky enough to be in Auckland when the "Station of Earthbound Ghosts" was on — it was a very atmospheric exhibition...

LD: *It was fun, thank you.*

EF: And I've recently had a chance to look at the publication, *Te Tangi a Te Matuhi*, which has grown out of that work. What sort of relationship do you see, if any, between your earlier work — I'm thinking of *Willy's Gazette* and *And* — and this more recent project?

LD: *Good question. Well Willy's Gazette was all about time and movement. An early reviewer noticed the wind references. I'd forgotten all about that theme. And yet after doing the flag show, and re-reading Willy's Gazette it struck me how nothing much has changed. There's still a fascination with movement and the movement is... well, you know that Heraclitean metaphor? That you don't stand in the same river twice?..So the sense of time. So I guess as something I*

associate with, as a part of the meaning band that I go back to, it's a concern in all it's different features, with time. And "Earthbound Ghosts" was as much about that as anything else. I mean it was about other things, but there is still that sense of the indeterminate, that which is not quite fully pinned down. And Willy's Gazette was in a sense — as I read it now — it never quite arrives, it's always chasing some shift in meaning. So it's all about shiftiness. And the flag show is all about shiftiness as well. You know, jiggering, the indeterminate, that which is constantly evolving. An alternative title for the flag show was the name of one of the pieces which was "Adoration of the Bleeding Edge," and that could be a title for Willy's Gazette as well. It'd give it a completely different reading. I was talking about this with Roger and Alex before, it's possible reading Willy's Gazette — for me — that I misinterpreted at the time the centre of energy. At the time I would have said "this is about the discovery of language as an organising metaphor," now I might say "this is about the discovery of history." And certainly Te Tangi a te Matuhi is part of that much more fully developed discovery of history.

EF: Well I suppose this relates to that increased engagement with history, but it strikes me that there is in the flag show and book a gesture towards some kind of biculturalism, whereas *And* didn't really show any interest in postcolonial or bicultural issues. Is *Te Tangi a Te Matuhi* an attempt to redress that lack in some way?

LD: No, one's a precondition for the other. You see the classical figure in an Allen Curnow poem is man being introduced to the landscape as if for the first time. The classical figure in Willy's Gazette is in the culture as a surfer, so there's a sense of immersion and accommodation. That sense of alienation is not there, not there for this reader. With the flag show... just change another culture — the same thing applies. It... I'm not being precise enough about this... Willy's Gazette was about a world of movement, the flag show was about a world of

movement which had bicultural features but they weren't privileged. But it was about a place where meaning lay that was interesting, perhaps this is the best way to talk about it: the hauhau is actually the thing that does it for me with the flag show. It's not you a Maori, me European — that's bicultural. It's the third term, it's the inflected difference, it's the consequence of that particular dialogue — the transfer of vocabulary and style, technology, a transfer of meaning that gets all mixed and muddled up and something new emerges. So it's the third term that the flag show is very much concerned with. It's why I can talk about Princess Diana in the same way I can talk about Te Kooti, because they are characters where in both situations, in both legends, with both public figures you have a tremendous amount of confused reading and writing going on about them.

I'm not sure where we started on this Emma, or how I can connect that back to Willy's Gazette, except to say that Willy's Gazette was about a figure who was a cultural participant, and I was a cultural participant with the flag show. I had no sense — and this really scared a lot of people, and by proxy scared me when I saw their anxiety, but didn't feel it myself — there was no sense that I was treading on sacred ground, or behaving in a rash manner given the sensitivity of the material, because it was much more transformative, everything's in a new big washing machine, and so it's much more focused on the third term than on the cultural tradition that Maori represents and my greater or lesser ability to read it. I was not worried about that, it was the interaction of those two to produce a third.

EF: I understand that as part of the show and the launch of the publication you had a hui down on the East Coast, would you tell me a bit about the significance of that event?

LD: Well that was very interesting. Te Kooti founded a church, the adherents of that church are Ringatu. In the course of getting permission to use an image

which I took out of Judith Binney's book for a flag I got to know Elizabeth Moeau. She's a descendant of Te Kooti's. Elizabeth gave me the family's permission to use this particular image, which was all the permission I could get. In the course of that dialogue, I wanted Elizabeth to help me find someone from the Ringatu church who would construct a ceremony for the opening of the flag show here, and that was Wirangi Pera. Following the flag show here there was such a lot of energy in our team still, inclusive of the team with Wirangi, that we developed the idea of taking the show to Gisborne, and for that we developed the idea of doing the book. So when we got to Gisborne it was Wirangi Pera who organised this, it was at the Rongopai meeting house down there, and the hui arose out of Wirangi and others' reading of the flag show as about the invisible return of Te Kooti... You know the story?

EF: Yes.

LD: *So the hui was not about the flag show so much as about a set piece — the Ringatu world of bringing Te Kooti's spirit back from exile to his home region. So there were two ceremonies, there was the hui, and then there was an opening ceremony at the army hall. And the point about this... context was very important to the flag show, we took over the railway station, and it was also very important when we took it to Gisborne, because we put all these wonderful signs of ambiguous power associated with Te Kooti in the middle of the army hall in the middle of Gisborne. So here's this little postcolonial facility down there — in much the same way that the railway station here has that sort of colouration — but it was faith and the army in the one place. So there was a story about that — the context was a positive part of the show. Part of that was that outside of the army hall, when we opened the show, we had a theatrical set piece from the army, I don't mean to demean it with the word theatre, but it was very... ritualistic, and the army was on one side — they were followers of a guy called Ropata Wahawaha who was a Ngati Porou person who chased Te Kooti for about five years... So they*

were on one side issuing the challenge, us on the side of the Rongowhakata... pro-Te Kooti people, and again, across that open ground, lots of call and response, and transformation, it was a space of transformation.

So lots of weird things happened in terms of call and response, and then we opened the show. So two formal set pieces — one of the army hall to do with an art event with symbolic implications, and one at a beautiful marae, much more peripherally connected to the flag show.

EF: So it was an occasion where all sorts of cultural exchanges were taking place...

LD: *Yeah, it was very relaxed, but very electric. Relaxed in the sense that I'd expected that the JAFAs would have been seen as such, that the Auckland crew would have been on the edge of rejection the whole time and fighting for their position, but the whole thing was much more incorporative than that.*

EF: I'm interested in the role that writing plays in your life at the moment. I'm aware that *Willy's Gazette* has recently been reprinted, and there is this new work with the flags, and through these things you appear to have re-emerged as a writer. Is writing a hobby, or does this signal some sort of new direction for you? Can we expect to see more of Leigh Davis in the next few years?

LD: *I don't know the answer to that really. The last two years have surprised me, I didn't really know where it came from. And I've got another book which I'll publish sometime in the next two months. But probably, because I read a lot, I like to be a player, not a spectator. And probably nothing gives me quite as much satisfaction as writing. It's what I do. Professionally it's a part of what I do, I'm kind of a knowledge worker so communication is a big part of what I do. So*

there's a much greater kind of connection between my cultural interests and my professional interests. But it needed some spark to get the writing side of things going again, and I think a lot of things grew out of that spark, and I can guess at some of them.

EF: So is the book that you will publish shortly poetry or...?

LD: *It's a combination of things... The flag show was... Well it started with Willy's Gazette, it started with And magazine — how do you create a bit more reader interest in the object itself? And I wanted to use more media with the flag show, and create an Alice in Wonderland experience, so that the reader was Alice and there were all these big soft objects around. So recontextualising reading. I've done that. So this book is an interaction with a sixteenth century artwork, which is multiply represented in the book. So it's poetry and this reproduced painting in a dialogue.*

EF: You described yourself in interviews with both the *Listener* and the *Sunday Star Times* as a "language worker." I'd like to hear you elaborate on that description. To what end are you working with language, is there a political or cultural project at work here?

LD: *I think the context at the time was that I really don't like the word poet. And I don't like the term poetry and I hate the term poem, because while that's what I do, using those labels doesn't explain what I am interested in. Now it's always possible that I just need to grow up in this regard, and I'm sure painters don't mind being called painters, but there is a particular type of subjectivity inherent in the word poetry, and the word poet. It's on the edge of precious, and it doesn't communicate to a culture any sense of "you should read this" or "this is a significant activity." I don't know why it's dead, but it's dead. Part of it is that it puts that particular kind of item into a cultural backwater that it doesn't deserve.*

So what I'm interested in is self-conscious language used under conditions of high compression. Now that's poetry. So "language worker" is a way of getting out of the poetry cul-de-sac.

It's a peculiar kind of coming-out anxiety too. People would say to me after the "Earthbound Ghosts" show "I couldn't make it out but my wife really liked it," so that's some kind of genteel sentiment, some sense of "this is an area of experience that's really not for me, it's too hot to handle, I feel uncomfortable or threatened by this poetry." And yet those same people will find poetry absolutely everywhere, you know, compressed, multivalent text, say. And they'll like it. It'll be in a newspaper headline, sporting commentary, a billboard, a magazine, a line in a song, whatever it is, they'll like it, they'll like that particular use of language, and yet they'll never put the word "poetry" to it, never be caught saying "I like poetry" because it's really fighting for it's life, I think, you know, the whole practice. And yet it shouldn't be. People are as sensitive to complex entertainments as ever they were, it's an evergreen art form. It's just that we need to find a different word for it.

EF: Clearly a large part of the impetus behind *And* was a dissatisfaction with the state of academic discourse about literature in New Zealand universities during the late seventies and early eighties, while you and Alex were studying at Auckland. Does it seem to you that the institutions have changed markedly since that time? Are they now places where students are taught and encouraged to challenge orthodoxies, or is it just that there are a new set of orthodoxies in place?

LD: *I can't really comment on that. I haven't been part of the academic scene for a long time. But I would doubt whether... Well I'd be sure that the universities have changed. But we're talking about a very long period of time, we're talking fifteen years minimum, I mean what's an internet year? Four months. The last*

fifteen years have been a long time in cultural history.

EF: You said in an interview with Hugh Lauder in *Landfall*, in 1985, that "And began at a time when you had to argue for the use of theory in New Zealand literature and it's finishing at a time when you have to argue the opposite."

LD: *Gee, I was good in those days...*

EF: It's a great interview... I was terrified about interviewing you after reading it...

LD: *I don't think I've read it...*

EF: Did you mean by that that the discourse had gone from being undertheorised to overtheorised?

LD: *Oh no, just that we had been successful in getting people to acknowledge the validity of... systematic... what's the term, theory is not the right word anymore... of systematic observation. And therefore people who wanted to go backwards really had to argue hard. You know, people who wanted to deny that you could read in all sorts of ways had a hard job.*

EF: At the end of that interview with Lauder the tape-recorder breaks down, and Lauder leaves the reader with rather a tantalising summary of the other things you discussed. One of these is the relationship between poststructuralism and late capitalism, which is an area I am particularly interested in. Do you see a connection between these two areas in New Zealand in the early 1980s?

LD: *That's too far back for me actually Emma. I'd put it differently. I'd say that I look for economics in most forms of artwork. So I've tuned into systems of exchange and valuation, tuned into the buying and selling context of a lot of artwork. You can see it... well I went to Disneyland last week with Henry, and that's just one pretty obvious example that content is actually a very valuable economic commodity. It's so natural to see that because that's what it is. It doesn't belittle content, and it doesn't belittle the exchange that trades it, and you know Te Tangi a Te Matuhi only exists because Susan and I could fund it. And it only has its particular character because it's an independent production, therefore the editorial committee was convened for the occasion and then disestablished. So often an artwork reflects the realities of getting it produced, which are economic realities typically.*

If a publishing house had done Te Tangi a Te Matuhi it would have been negotiated a lot more with different people and it would have a different character. That's not really answering your question, but I suppose I notice these things as a matter of course.

EF: Yeah, but it's interesting though because I wanted to bring this up in relation to an article you published in *Midwest Four*, 1994, "Where am I in Relation to the Market?"...

LD: Yes yes yes!

EF: Ideas about value in the art market...

LD: *It was a little polemical, but the point is true...*

EF: A little? Your final paragraph was "If markets are neutral and meaning is extrinsically defined, audience reaction and market prices

should be regarded as intellectually important, rather than simply facilitative, to the curatorial policies of art museums. There is important cultural information in market prices. On average the market should drive and certify the practices of curators as much as the reverse is true." To me this seems to relate to the issues that I am particularly interested in — the relationship between the cultural and economic spheres, and I'm sure it was drawn to your attention that in the next issue of *Midwest* Tony Green wrote a letter criticising your position...

LD: *He felt a little threatened by that I think...*

EF: His criticism was that for a curator to do their job well they need to promote challenging, difficult new art. This may not be what the market demands. How would you defend your position against such a statement?

LD: *Well I think the time frames are perhaps what's at issue here. What I was really saying was that sooner or later the market catches up, and it gets it about right. It may be later. You could probably plot the market price of a Monet in real terms over the course of a hundred years now, and you'd get this really strongly rising curve I'm sure, and it's just that it has taken the market a hundred years to catch up with Monet, but it got there. And so the difference between Tony and I is that Tony is arguing for the important cultural role of early adopters — people who can spot the Monets before the oil's dry, and I agree with him. But my point is on average — the "on average" is perhaps an overly technical term — but it would surprise me if you had really good art that was meaningful, culturally resonant, that never acquired a price. I think meaning is an extremely valuable thing. People don't think of it like that but it is. And in an internet world, there are corporations basing their entire strategies on meaning. You know, not meaning which people would give a lot for in a university context. News*

Corporation for example... Now it's a content company. It's looking at selling content to new consumers through new distribution channels. My point is that meaning has a value. Rich meaning has a rich value. Always has done.

Tony and I have chatted about that particular call and response, and he's right, curators should be early adopters, they should be catalysts for new work, but if they're doing their job they don't front-run the market by too much because, well, the market is just a collection of people's views and... I'm labouring the point...

EF: But that's interesting in relation to another comment Green makes at the end of his letter, questioning how your statements about art and value apply to your own work. He refers to the fact that *Willy's Gazette* was a small publication, and it was difficult for most people to come to terms with... I imagine if he had written after the flag show he would have described that in a similar way. Are you expecting the market to catch up with your own art?

LD: *Yes, but publishing's a bit different I think. With publishing there's no rarity value, and the consumable isn't an original on the wall or whatever, but I would know that the work had succeeded if it became widely regarded. Numbers. If you go back to that Midwest article you'll see that what I'm saying is that numbers are very important, they're highly correlated with value. You can get very important artists like Len Lye for example who really struggles on the numbers side of things, but on average the two are correlated, quality with numbers.*

EF: So either through price, or distribution...

LD: *Yeah, or volume of comment.*

EF: Well I suppose my focus on the idea of a relationship between poststructuralism and late capitalism stems from the historical conjunction of the *And* project and the advent of Rogernomics. And I'm aware that you were working in Treasury while the magazines were conceived and produced, so *And* emerged at the same time as these new economic theories which were then carried out by the fourth Labour government. It seems to me that there is some underlying connection between these two facts...

LD: *Well, why don't you take the briefing for the incoming Labour government, published by Treasury in July 1984. Have a look at the investigation of public policy that's carried out in that document. And I think you'll see some gauche bits and good bits, a little bit the way that you'd see And magazine — some gauche bits and some good bits. Both coming from the same point of view and highly contemporaneous, both trying to say "let's get away from anecdotal, time-honoured, the past will write the future, kinds of discussion about these intangibles — public policy or art. Let's try and find some way of interrogating public policy or art which is more systematic, more thoughtful, more coherent." So you should look at that book as a "for instance."*

EF: Of course looking at this, even in a New Zealand context isn't anything new. The postmodernism/late capitalism connection has been drawn time and again, there are some quite interesting comments which have been made about this by various critics, some of which I'd like to run by you if that's ok...

LD: *Sure.*

EF: There are some comments made by Edward Said, and he is talking about postmodern literary criticism in relation to the late capitalism of the

Reagan era. There are some parallels he draws in an article entitled "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community" which I'd like to quote and ask you to comment on. Said identifies four imperatives of corporate capitalism, and then relates them to literary criticism. The first of these imperatives is: "The rediscovery of the self-regulating market, the wonders of free enterprise, and the classical liberal attack on government regulation of the economy, all in the name of liberty", and Said suggests that the ramification for criticism is that it "minds its own business and is 'free' to do what it wishes with no community responsibility whatever." Do you see the economic theories of non-interference or non-intervention as being related to a lack of community responsibility among intellectual as well as financial élites?

LD: Well no I don't. I'll make a peripheral comment in a little while, but markets are not championed all the time by people who think that liberty is a priori a good thing. There is a libertarian side to it but people's analysis of how markets work is typically motivated by trying to find some system which produces more and makes more inequality out of economic activity, creates more wealth than other systems. So it's about wealth creation. You go — this is in a different field now — when I go to the States I don't go to a place which is the land of the free — that's the liberty thing — I go to a place where markets are working astonishingly well, and the economy is strong, and you've got fabulous critical mass working for you. The society has a character associated with that — good or bad — but I'd rather that than, say, the experience New Zealand cycles through from time to time, with economic dependency, economic torment and uncertainty, and quite fragile markets. Governments veering left and right, killing markets, or failing to acknowledge that they exist — you know the Winston Peters style behaviour.

So, how do I pull this back in? I see markets as socially responsible. You know I'm off base here in terms of this discussion, because that's a fairly clunky

formulation, but I really worry about people who say "I like markets because I want to be free," well you can forget that. It may or may not be the case, but on grounds that I can more strongly relate to, try doing anything without markets. You get poorer quality food, you get more expensive cars, you get poorer quality Telecom systems, you get poorer quality entertainment, the basket of things that you consume would be less than it otherwise would be.

EF: So you see markets as working for people, improving standards... rather than...

LD: *Yeah. That is the way I see it. Then you can focus on all the other attendant consequences, and there are lots of them, but net-net I'd prefer to live in a market-driven economy where people understand economic success, value it, and participate in it, rather than being alienated from it, with all sorts of views about how there ought to be a better way. It's got very high survival imperatives...*

EF: Just following on from that, looking historically at what *And* came out of — and I do realise that you haven't looked at the magazines recently — there are some interesting pieces by Roger Horrocks which talk quite specifically about Muldoon, and the kind of anti-theory, anti-intellectual culture which Muldoon epitomised. I suppose that both the new intellectual theories and the new economic theories were a reaction against the sorts of policies Muldoon promoted...

LD: *Well he was somebody everyone loved to hate. He was a symbol, still is. People talk about Winston Peters and they say he's inherited Muldoon's mantle, so Muldoon is the symbol of that discussion. Sometimes you need a common enemy to define your product. He was the common enemy for the Treasury in the early eighties, so he was the reference person for our criticism. Just thinking back in the course of this conversation, *And* was really arguing for a high*

tolerance for inquiry, rather than a low tolerance for inquiry. It was arguing for people to take technology risks, to bring a reading framework into the foreground rather than leave it invisible. Simple enough stuff but it seemed important to do at the time. That's all been internalised now, so it's second nature for people. You read Philip Matthews's discussion in the Listener, or Justin Paton from time to time in Art New Zealand, they're smart, savvy, people who are writing in a way that is far more sophisticated than And ever was. It's like they're using these groovy laptops and And was excited at the advent of the computer. That's fine, it's just the way it goes, an evolutionary path.

My point is that things that seemed very strange for And to do, and therefore it had to argue for and do it in sometimes quite a clunky way, are now second nature. People's reading habits pick up, you know. In fact someone was saying about Willy's Gazette recently — I think it was Gregory O'Brien — that he reads Willy's Gazette really differently now. Well so do I, but the point is that people loosen up, people organise meaning — this is my thinking anyway — according to some kind of typical exchange which is associated with the meaningful, which is typically an evaluation of an experience — lived experience which predated the writing. Now people are aware of context so much more strongly, and what was first nature then is now second nature.

EF: I'd like to go back to the Said if we can. The second imperative of corporate capitalism he identifies is "the reinvention of the idea of progress, now cast in terms of 'innovation' and 'reindustrialization', and the limitation of expectations and social welfare in the quest for productivity." This can be "retranslated" according to Said as meaning that "the number of jobs for young graduates has shrunk dramatically as an inevitable result of market forces, which in turn prove the marginality of scholarship that is premised on its own harmless obsolescence. This has created a demand for sheer innovation and indiscriminate publication...

and it has virtually destroyed the career trajectory and social horizons of young people within the system."

Does it seem to you that there is a relationship between the market-driven environment and the proliferation of theoretical work in the last few decades — are academics driven to produce and innovate by imperatives imposed by the market?

LD: *Sure. Take Disneyland. Now first of all I didn't see any Donald Duck exhibit, I saw a Mickey Mouse, so Disneyland is trying to underweight its past and upweight more recent things. So the best exhibit for me at Disneyland was an Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom exhibit. It's the same thing. Appetites for entertainment shift, and they demand more things and innovation creates more choice, and people say "oh, I like that," and this gets left behind, consigned to art history. Is that what Said is talking about?*

EF: Well, yes and no...

LD: *But isn't that a positive?*

EF: But he implies that innovation has become commodified in a way... That the impulse to innovate is driven by commercial imperatives... The need to produce new work whether it is worth doing or not. He talks about "sheer innovation and indiscriminate publication"...

LD: *He's pointing to an excess — of a good thing. Self-reinvention and innovation I'd generally think and the community generally thinks is a good thing. It needn't be connected to simple-minded observations of progress, it's just reinvention and innovation. And you can look at the opposite of those words and you can construct some not-nice-to-know things. Common sense — that's a*

good thing. If he's trying to construct an idea of a systematic control using its ability to direct people properly, well yes and no. So I'm not sure about Said in this regard.

EF: Well his third and fourth imperatives are curlier still, but I'd like to toss them in here anyway. He identifies "the attack on democracy, in the name of 'efficiency', 'manageability', 'governability', 'rationality' and 'competence'." And then "the restoration of the authority of expertise, and the renewed use of science as legitimation for social policy through deepening industry ties to universities and other 'free' institutions of policy analysis and recommendation". He relates this in his American context to the issue of collaboration between government, corporations and universities, which is something that has been widely commented about. Do you think that such a critique can be applied to our context here in New Zealand?

LD: *I find it hard to answer that — partly because of Said's polysyllables. But think about what's inherent there. I think there's a lot of mistrust and suspicion, a lot of fear. Fear of what he doesn't understand. That's uncharitable about Said, who's a wonderful scholar. But there's a lot of fear of business. You know I get this a lot, which really puzzles me, there's no fear of dentists, but there's a fear of used car salesmen, no fear of nurses, but a lot of fear of business. Someone commenting on Willy's Gazette once said "oh, he did quite good work but then he went into business." It's a Faustian myth, it's the sell-your-soul-to-the-devil fear of business.*

EF: Well it does all seem rather mysterious to those of us who aren't part of it...

LD: *Oh it's not! I mean you go and buy your groceries every week or every*

fortnight — do you ever figure out how the groceries came to be there? Why it is that you're dealing with Big Fresh or some new-generation New World, rather than the corner dairy and loose groceries with sugar and coffee measured out of a sack? You drive a car in 1999 and you enjoy all the things that go with that piece of technology, or you get a new PC in 1999 and you think "my god this is so much better than the first Apple Mac I got in 1985" — there's no fear of any of that. There's actually an understanding that broadly you're enjoying outcomes which are more highly evolved. There could be some things that you don't want so you don't chose to buy them, so ultimately if there are enough of you they don't flourish. My point is that these things that we regard as completely second nature are not accidental by-products of business, they're what business does.

EF: I do understand where this "fear of business" comes from though... It often seems shifty, working with intangibles...

LD: *I think that's just tribe one not knowing about tribe two. It doesn't make tribe two bad.*

EF: Putting it in tribal terms is useful, because it strikes me that this is another cross-cultural exchange — the business world and where cultural, academic and art work is situated. What interests me is that you have a foot in both camps. Perhaps you're the third term you referred to earlier?

LD: *It's very common you know Emma. Take lawyers for example. Greg McGee — good lawyer, legal training. Lots of lawyers write novels. Now lawyers — is that business? Is it commercial? Of course it is. They exist in partnerships where they sell their services for cash. It's business. It's an overrated fear. And it's also the Faustian thing — that the business environment is one which is always gothic, only sometimes you don't see it.*

EF: I was going to throw another quote at you, one from Frank Lentricchia about social responsibility and criticism, but I don't think it will really serve our purposes now, as you have said that you see the market as socially responsible...

LD: *That abstraction is banalised, isn't it? I don't think it's socially irresponsible because it is competing for support every day. It's a numbers game, socially it's a numbers game, QED... And it's a survival game too. You make a complex piece of meaning and it's got to resonate with people or it dies. It's got to have readers or it dies. It's the exchange between readers and the written which creates an art work. You make a widget or you start up a commercial magazine — you've got to get subscribers, you've got to get people to buy it. It's a reasonably straightforward thing...*

EF: Yes, but it strikes me as interesting that *And* was very much not commercial.

LD: *But that's all right. Te Tangi a Te Matuhi was very much not commercial too. It was commercial insofar as that we solved the commercial difficulties of getting it done. It's not a blockbuster, this is a small market, it was significant to do, it was some kind of voluntary activity. People do it all the time.*

EF: Do they? On one hand, you see markets as being socially productive and central to the definition of value in terms of art, and yet on the other, you are prepared to ignore the economic imperatives you identify when it comes to your own creative work...

LD: *I'm creating some outcomes that wouldn't otherwise be there. Does it have a market value? No. What I'm doing is nice but it has an audience of a hundred. I have to think about that... So you're saying that if what I'm doing has rich*

meaning it has a monetisable value, because content is like that, therefore why did I see it as a not-for-business activity? I guess I'm just an early adopter, getting something out there. Part of *And* too is that you construct a rationale which is never quite wholly justified, but it's necessary to get you up and running. I'm not saying that *And*'s implied industrial criticism of the teaching of New Zealand literature was wholly justified, it just created a new vantage point. A new community of interest, which was sufficiently coherent to do a magazine on. It's quite different, you see. I remember at the time you had a lot of what was called New Wave music, so you had the sixties and seventies kind of rock icons breaking up and the rock music genre was becoming progressively developed into niches — which is where it is now — and in order for someone's product over here to create and sustain an audience they had to create and sustain a criticism of that which they were different to. *And* is no different from that. It's almost like factionalism of any kind, you get a group of people with common interests who construct a mythology of difference, that gives people the energy to do something new, and then they do it. I think that *And* was gauche to the extent that it never really brought that particular reality into the frame.

EF: Actually something that I wanted to ask was how significant the role of Simon During was in the conception of the *And* project...

LD: Not directly at all. Alex and Simon were room-mates at university, and Simon was a brilliant character, and I think was part of the motivation to do something new in Alex's life. I didn't know Simon until the back end of things... When did Simon first do a piece, was it *And*/4?

EF: He was in *And*/1... He wrote 'Towards a Revision of Local Critical Habits' in the first issue...

LD: That's right. Okay, well Alex and Simon were room-mates and they

influenced each other a lot... I don't know what it was that got Alex out of the mode of John Berryman and the long poem, the move from criticism to theory — I don't know what did that for him. I know what did it for me, and it's no one thing, and then there was a dialogue between the two of us which produced And.

EF: So what were the catalysts for that change in your work?

LD: *My thesis on Allen Curnow was very important, and all of the DIY that goes with that. I think Willy's Gazette — this is an important thing to say — Willy's Gazette was me trying to connect them... There are a number of formal breakthroughs in Willy's Gazette that create a direct connection through to "Earthbound Ghosts." I mentioned before the concern with time. That's a big continuity. It's where I go when I think about things. The concern with language as a thick substance also, but stylistically there's a development... My style is on the edge of opaque — transparent on the edge of opaque, it's readable on the edge of unreadable. There are a number of parts of Willy's Gazette which I think of as being me finding the style that works for me. So stylistically there are a lot of nursery features in Willy's Gazette which have remained part of what I do — I've developed those.*